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The Green-room of the Avignon Theatre.

THE ROMANCES OF ALEXANDRE DUMAS

OLYMPE DE CLÈVES

Volume One

The Regency Romances

V. 4

McCLURE BOOK CO.
NEW YORK

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INTRODUCTORY NOTE.

ALTHOUGH Monsieur Dumas, in the explanatory note appended to these volumes, cites contemporary authority for the final catastrophe as having actually taken place, we are not, of course, to assume that any other portion of Bannière's career, as traced in this story, is founded upon fact. The novelist is himself responsible for the plot so far as it is concerned with the fortunes of Olympe and her ardent and headstrong lover.

But the scenes which deal with the conspiracy (for it was nothing less) to corrupt young Louis XV., and force him to adopt a career of unredeemed profligacy, are founded upon indisputable evidence, adapted, of course, to the exigencies of the narrative. Indeed, the authority of contemporaneous memoirs may be cited in support of some of the most improbable details; for example, the queen's coldness toward the king, and the various anecdotes concerning Mademoiselle de Charolais.

It should be remarked that the dates are somewhat mixed to meet the requirements of the plot: the Duc de Bourbon and Madame de Prie were disgraced and exiled a considerable time before Richelieu's return from Vienna; four or five years, at least, instead of four or five days, elapsed between his return and the final surrender of Louis XV. to the charms of Madame de Mailly; and the episode of Bachelier's unsuccessful mission to the queen is usually assigned to a date considerably later still.

It would be difficult, within the proper limits of a note like this, to set forth all the elements which combined to form this conspiracy against the morals of the young king. The queen herself unwittingly helped on the scheme by her want of tact, and her failure to humor the whims of her capricious lord and master, who seems to have been afflicted with the royal disease — ennui — as no mortal ever was afflicted before or since. The daughter of a king who had lost his kingdom and had infinitesimal prospects of ever procuring another, reared in the strictest seclusion, and of an intensely devout and religious temperament, Marie Leczinska, though an amiable, tender-hearted, charitable princess, and a loving wife and mother, was ill fitted to preside over a court which subsisted partly upon memories

of the halcyon days of the Regency, and partly upon the hope of seeing those days return.

In their interesting and clever work, "La Duchesse de Chateauroux et ses Sœurs," the De Goncourts devote much space to an enumeration of the various classes of persons who "did their utmost to bring about the accession of a mistress who would cause a revolution at Versailles, change the course of the stream of favor, and rejuvenate the whole government."

Prominent among them were those who were disgusted with the commonplace, peace-at-any-price policy of the Cardinal-Minister Fleury, whose dominion over his former pupil was absolute.

"But a curious thing happened," say Messieurs de Goncourt: "these machinations, which had for their real object the overthrow of the ministry and the minister, met with the assent at least, if not the active support, of the minister himself, on condition that he be consulted as to the selection of a favorite, and be assured of the *political* neutrality of the person selected."

The undeniable agency of Fleury in the corruption of his youthful sovereign is the saddest and most deplorable single circumstance of this whole sad and deplorable reign. His unlimited ascendancy over the king's will gave him more power

than Richelieu or Mazarin had ever known; and yet for no conceivable reason, unless to guard that power against the fancied danger of a possible return of Louis' affection for his lawful spouse, and a consequent revival of the influence of the Duc de Bourbon, he, an octogenarian, already within sight of the tomb, and clothed with the highest dignity in the gift of the Holy See, deliberately assisted to force illicit connections upon the youth upon whose future character and conduct the destiny of France depended, and whose will had been his from his cradle.

Fleury and Richelieu fitly typify the epoch which has been well named by Monsieur Henri Martin the period of the "Decline of the French Monarchy."

Monsieur Dumas has drawn a somewhat more flattering picture of the Comte de Mailly than the contemporary memoirs warrant. He seems to have been a dissolute, extravagant young gentleman; and one writer goes so far as to assert that he made the contract which resulted in his wife's *liaison* with the king, and that he made it against her will. This statement is unsupported, however, and the weight of evidence is against its probable accuracy. The Duc de Luynes, in his Memoirs, records the fact that Monsieur de Mailly was imprisoned and exiled in 1739, because he persisted in continuing his

membership in the order of Freemasons, — at that time a novelty in France, and frowned upon by the authorities.

With his usual matchless skill, Monsieur Dumas has so interwoven history and romance that each embellishes the other; and the result is a harmonious and intensely interesting whole, albeit the period was conspicuously lacking in those stirring, chivalric incidents which furnished the themes for the marvellous romances of the days of the Valois kings and the first Bourbons. If there is little to appeal to the imagination and stir the blood, as do the exploits of D'Artagnan and his comrades on their expedition to England to recover Anne of Austria's necklace from His Grace of Buckingham, or the combat in which Bussy d'Amboise sold his life so dearly when called upon to pay the price of the love of "La Dame de Monsoreau," there is, on the other hand, much more of purely intellectual interest, — more perhaps than in any other of the historical romances of Monsieur Dumas.

The chapters which introduce us to the interior of the Jesuit novitiate are by no means the least interesting: the character of Père Mordon is carefully drawn, and is provided with an excellent foil in the person of the timid and irresolute Père de la Sante; and a world of information as to the objects

and mode of government of this most remarkable and entirely unique organization is imparted in attractive form, and relieved from all possibility of tedium by the constant presence on the stage of poor Bannière, as the "awful example," whether in the chapel, in Père Mordon's sanctum, or in the Chamber of Meditation, with its cheerful embellishments in the way of mottoes and emblems.

The extraordinary pathos of the concluding chapters, although they do not perhaps form what is sometimes called a "good ending," will not in the eyes of the judicious reader detract from the singular charm of a story which is considered by no less competent a judge than the poet and critic, William Ernest Henley, to be a masterpiece of fiction.

In the reign of Louis XV. little sanctity attached to the marriage contract, and unchastity was very far from being looked upon as a crime. Under no other circumstances, perhaps, would the author have found it possible to depict a woman who, notwithstanding that her life was lived in accordance with a moral standard far below that by which the conduct of the nineteenth-century woman is measured, should yet so win our interest and affection, yes, and our respect, as noble, warm-hearted, loving, and true Olympe de Clèves.

LIST OF CHARACTERS.

Period, 1727-1729.

LOUIS XV., at the age of eighteen, King of France.
MARIE LECZINSKA, his queen.
CARDINAL FLEURY, formerly Bishop of Fréjus.
MONSIEUR LE DUC DE RICHELIEU.
MADEMOISELLE DE CHAROLAIS, } Princesses of the
MADEMOISELLE DE CLERMONT, her sister, } Blood.
COMTE DE TOULOUSE, Grand Admiral of France, son of Louis XIV. and Madame de Montespan.
COMTESSE DE TOULOUSE.
MONSIEUR LE DUC DE BOURBON, First Minister.
MONSIEUR LE DUC DE PECQUIGNY, captain of the King's Guards.
BACHELIER, valet-de-chambre to the King.
PHILIPPE V., King of Spain.
MADAME LA MARQUISE DE PRIE.
MADEMOISELLE PAULMIER.
ABBÉ DE POLET, confessor to Cardinal Fleury.
BARJAC, Cardinal Fleury's valet-de-chambre.
THE ARCHBISHOP OF PARIS.
M. FORESTIER, commandant of Swiss.
MADAME DE NESLE.
RAFTÉ, valet to Duc de Richelieu.
ABBÉ DE SINZENDORF.
COMTE LOUIS ALEXANDRE DE MAILLY, captain-lieutenant of the company of Scottish Guards.

LOUISE-JULIE DE NESLE, Comtesse de Mailly, his wife.
MADAME DE LAURAGUAIS,
MADAME DE VINTIMILLE,
MADAME DE LA TOURNELLE,
} sisters of Comtesse de Mailly.
OLYMPE DE CLÈVES, an actress.
JACQUES BANNIÈRE, a novice of the Society of Jesus, in love with Olympe de Clèves.
PÈRE MORDON, Superior of the Jesuits of Avignon.
PÈRE DE LA SANTÉ, a Jesuit Father.
L'ABBÉ D'HOIRAC.
CHAMPMESLÉ, an actor, afterwards an abbé.
MADEMOISELLE CLAIRE, maid to Olympe de Clèves.
THE HAIR-DRESSER to Olympe de Clèves.
THE GOVERNOR OF THE CITY OF AVIGNON.
LA CATALANE, an actress at Lyons.
THE MANAGER OF THE THEATRE AT LYONS.
JACOB, a Lyons money-lender.
THE VICAR OF THE ARCHBISHOP AT LYONS.
THE MARQUIS DELLA TORRA, an adventurer.
MARION, his wife.
PÈRE PHILÉMON,
LAURENT,
} retainers of Comte de Mailly.
A MAJOR OF DRAGOONS.
A MAGISTRATE OF THE CHÂTELET.
MARTIN, a keeper at Charenton.

OLYMPE DE CLÈVES.

I.

AVIGNON.

"See Naples and die," says the Neapolitan. "He who has not seen Seville has seen nothing worth seeing," says the Andalusian. "To remain without the gates of Avignon is to remain without the gates of Paradise," says the Provençal.

In fact, if we give credit to the historian of the Papal city, Avignon is not the foremost city of the South alone, but of all France and of the world.

Listen to what he says: —

"Avignon is ennobled by its antiquity; its situation is delightful, its walls superb; its soil fairly revels in its own fertility, its people are charming in their gentle manners, its palaces are magnificent, and its broad streets fair to look upon; its bridge is a marvel of architectural and mechanical skill, its commerce is flourishing, and it is famous in every corner of the globe."

Enthusiastic praise that, I should say! And yet we who come a hundred years after him who wrote these words are disposed to add something to them rather than to take anything away.

Indeed, to the traveller who journeys down the river to which Tibullus applied the epithet of *celer*, Ausonius *præceps*, and Florus *impiger;* to him who begins at

Montélimar to realize that he is in the South, by the warmer coloring of the landscape, the greater clearness of the air, and the more distinct outlines of objects; to him who sails with a shudder under the deadly arches of the Pont Saint-Esprit, each one of which has its name, so that one may know at once to what spot to carry assistance when a vessel is wrecked against one of them; to him who leaves at the right Roquemaure, where Hannibal crossed the Rhone with his forty elephants, and at the left the Château de Mornas, from the summit of which Baron des Adrets made an entire Catholic garrison leap off to the ground, — to such an one, Avignon, at a sharp bend in the stream, suddenly appears with royal magnificence.

It is true that the only thing which one perceives of Avignon at the moment that the city itself appears, is its gigantic château, the palace of the Popes, — a fourteenth-century edifice, and the only perfect specimen of the military architecture of that period; it is built upon the site of an earlier temple of Diana, who gave her name to the city.

But how does it happen, pray, that a temple of Diana could give its name to the future abode of the Popes of Rome? We will proceed to enlighten our readers upon this point, bespeaking that measure of indulgence which we have always noticed that readers are glad to extend to etymologists.

Ave Diana! (Hail, Diana!) said the traveller at the most distant point from which he could discern the temple of the chaste divinity, in the halcyon days of classical Latin, the days of Cicero, Virgil, and Augustus; *Ave Niana!* the boatmen had it in the time of Constantine, — a time when provincial idioms had already corrupted the purity of the Latin tongue; *Ave Nio!*

said the troops of the Comtes de Toulouse, de Provence, and de Forcalquier; hence *Avignon!*

Understand that this is history; we should be much less positive than we are, if instead of history we were writing a novel.

Thus you see that Avignon has been of all time a privileged city; moreover, she was one of the first to have a magnificent bridge,— a bridge built in 1177, by a young shepherd named Bennezet, who exchanged his pastoral crook for a pastoral frock, and was lucky enough to be canonized. To be sure, only three or four arches to-day remain to attest the quality of this structure, which was destroyed under Louis XIV., in the year of grace 1669,— almost fifty-eight years, that is to say, before the date when our story opens.

But it was towards the end of the fourteenth century especially, that Avignon was a glorious sight to see. Philippe le Bel, who had intended to bestow upon Clement V. and his successors in the Papal chair guards, a prison, and a place of refuge, really furnished them with a court, a palace, and a kingdom.

In very truth, that queen of luxury, of effeminacy and debauchery, which men called Avignon, did possess a court, a palace, and a kingdom; she had a girdle of walls which had been clasped about her ample waist by Hernaudy of Herodia, Grand Master of the Order of Saint John of Jerusalem; she had dissolute priests, who touched the symbol of the body of Christ with hands hot with lust; she had beautiful courtesans, sisters, nieces, and concubines of the Popes, who despoiled the tiara of its diamonds to make necklaces and bracelets for them; lastly, she had the plashing echoes of the fountain of Vaucluse, which repeated in amorous tones the sweet name of Laura, and lulled her to rest to the soft and licentious strains of the chansons of Petrarch.

It is true that when Gregory XI., at the earnest solicitation of Saint Bridget of Sweden and Saint Catherine of Sienna, left Avignon in 1376 for Rome, where he arrived on the 17th of January, 1377,— it is true that Avignon was then shorn of her splendor, although retaining her arms, which are gules with three golden keys facing one another, and supported by an eagle with this device, *Unguibus et rostris;* and was thenceforth naught but a mourning widow, an uninhabited palace, an empty tomb. The Popes indeed kept Avignon, which was very productive property, but they kept it as one keeps a château which one no longer uses as a residence; they sent a legate there to take their place, but he only did it in the same sense that an intendant takes the place of the proprietor, or the night of the day.

However, Avignon continued to be the religious city *par excellence*, for at the opening of our story she still contained one hundred and nine canons, fourteen beneficed priests, three hundred and fifty monks, and a like number of nuns, who, with a number of lesser ecclesiastics attached in various capacities to the eight chapters, formed a body of nine hundred individuals, — that is to say, a twenty-eighth part of the population, — whose lives were devoted to the service of the altar.

In addition Avignon, after having had seven times seven Popes who had reigned seven times ten years, possessed in 1727 seven times seven things which are of importance in estimating the attractions, the beauty, and the moral condition of a large city.

She had seven gates, seven palaces, seven parishes, seven collegiate churches, seven hospitals, seven monasteries of monks, and seven convents of nuns.

With regard to the claim put forward in behalf of "the gentle manners of its people," as one of the elements in

the attractiveness of Avignon, by her historian, François Nouguier, we are bound to say that it seems to be less supported by the facts than all the rest; and on this point alone do we take exception to his judgment, reminding him of the never-ending quarrels between the white and black penitents, who murdered one another at every opportunity, and divided the city into two camps which were always well supplied with broken heads.

Of course, we have not a word to say to him of the massacres of the Glacière in 1791, nor of the murder of Maréchal Brune in 1815. Those were occurrences which worthy François Nouguier, learned as he was, could not have foreseen at the time when he wrote.

But aside from these gentle manners, which are somewhat questionable in the eyes of the nineteenth century, Avignon exhibited herself in the beginning of the eighteenth under conditions which were agreeable to the eye and the mind of the traveller.

In the first place, besides the Dominicans who had been established there since 1226, and the Cordeliers in 1227, besides her Augustinians, Carmelites, Mathurins, Benedictines, Célestins, Minimes, Capuchins, Recollets, Fathers of Christian Doctrine, Unshod Carmelites, Antonines, Priests of the Oratory, and Observantins, Avignon had its Jesuit college and novitiate, founded in 1587 by Louis d'Ancezune.

Now, he who spoke of Jesuits at that time spoke of learned, affable men, who had a hand in every political, social, or commercial movement of the age: it might be that commercial interests summoned them to act as mediators in those distant, unknown seas into which flow the waters of the Ganges and the river Bleu, the Rhone of India and the Rhone of China; it might be that missionary zeal, urging them on to undiscovered lands,

enticed them to the vast plains of Brazil, or the mountain fastnesses of Chili; it might be that at their posts in Europe they scanned the unfolding pages of politics,— that volume without end, whose every word tells of hope blighted or ambition gratified, of a dynasty founded or a crown shattered; it might be that literature retained them, inheritors of the traditions of the Benedictines, beneath the gray arches of the cloister, between the little patch of turf with its sparse flowers, and the bright sunlight, cut off by the high walls of the college.

Avignon, that privileged city which had all that other cities have and a thousand things beside, had then her Jesuits with the rest; and it is to the chapel of the novitiate that we first introduce our reader, with the preliminary information that we are in the early days of May, 1727, and that Louis XV., now seventeen years of age, is King of France.

At the summit of a street which was called Rue des Novices, — we say "at the summit" advisedly, because the streets of Avignon, which city was built with a view to protection against the mistral and the sun, consist for the most part of steep ascents or sharp declivities, — on Rue des Novices, we say, arose the building of the novitiate, dwelling and chapel.

This building, similar in form and general plan to all those which the Jesuits have erected in France, or indeed in other countries, affected the sober and modest style which is of no special time, and can never compromise those who make use of it, since it reveals nothing to the eye materially, and one must needs be a very erudite archæologist to find the soul of a mass of stone in the works of a society of which many members deny a soul to mankind.

The Jesuits, parasitical travellers, disguised invaders,

while dreaming of conquering the whole world, step by step, were very careful, wherever they gained a foothold, that their tent, destined some day to become a citadel, should not give offence to the eye. Every parasite, when he takes his seat at table, is careful not to ape the elegance of the rich man's dress, nor to clothe himself in rags like the poor man; he would attract attention to his opulence or his poverty. Every ambitious person should assume an appearance of modesty, if not of absolute humility, ready, when the time is ripe, to stretch out his claws like the tiger, or to open his maw like the shark.

Thus it was that the Society of Jesus, in Flanders and France and Spain, where its principal houses were, had allowed the founders of these houses to make use only of the meaningless architecture of the cloister or barracks, which consisted at that time of great bare walls of stone or brick, with long windows barred with iron, a portico or two with very sober ornamentation, and here and there a half-column, — as if columns in full relief would have been too manifest an exhibition of luxury.

The same severe treatment prevailed in the interior, combined with most careful attention to hygienic conditions and the daily curriculum; the straight line prevailed wherever the fathers had to keep an eye upon the novices, but darkness and labyrinthine windings in those regions where they had to meet the public.

Further than this, we will not undertake to describe the interior of the establishment of the Jesuit fathers at Avignon; one of our actors is awaiting us in the chapel of the novices, where, in view of the importance of his rôle, we will hasten to join him.

And yet, as every drama has its *mise en scène*, we ought to say a word of this chapel to which we are about to introduce our readers, just as we have had

a word to say of the city which they have traversed with us.

Let them stay a moment upon the threshold, then, and they will see a circular apartment of moderate size, with unfigured windows, which receive the light directly beneath the cupola, and shed its full brilliancy upon the lofty arches, but sift it gradually, so that it reaches the flagstones of the floor much reduced in brilliancy. A long altar, almost without ornamentation, is stretched like a chord across the arc of the apse; behind the altar are a few oak stalls, screened and dark, to afford greater facilities for spying or for meditation on the part of the fathers who take their places there during the services. Such is a description of the place in a few strokes.

It was one o'clock, and all the services were at an end; the sun was beating down furiously upon the city, so that the church was deserted.

At the left of the altar, however, beside a narrow aisle which led to the stalls of which we have spoken, a young novice, clad in the black robe of the order, was sitting in a chair against a pillar, his head half buried in a book, which he was devouring rather than reading.

The young man was not so absorbed in his book, nevertheless, as to forget to cast a stealthy glance to right and left every few moments; on his left was the little door by which the fathers could enter the chapel from the novitiate; at his right the large door which gave admittance to the faithful from the street.

Was it simple curiosity or was it absent-mindedness? The latter surely would be a very natural failing in a young person for whom breviary and ritual are but dry and monotonous pasturage.

But we have said that the young novice seemed to be devouring the pages of his book; did he thus look to

right and left to challenge the admiration of some one who was watching him, and was he a hypocrite instead of being absent-minded?

He was neither the one nor the other.

Any one who had crept up behind him and looked over his shoulder as he was reading, would have discovered that a volume of less size was concealed within the missal, — a volume of which the paper was cleaner and fresher, and of which the typographical appearance was irregular, that is to say, formed of those lines of unequal length which twenty-nine years later were to serve Master André as a criterion by means of which to distinguish betwixt verse and prose, when he measured them with a bit of string to make them neither too long nor too short.

Thus we need not wonder that the novice dreaded a surprise. It is the experience of every pupil who is hiding a forbidden book in his lesson-book. But there are forbidden books and forbidden books, just as there are sticks and sticks; there are books only slightly forbidden and books very vehemently forbidden; there are those which involve no more serious penalty than memorizing five hundred lines, and those which involve loss of liberty, — the dungeon even.

To which class did the volume belong which the disciple of Loyola was reading, and in which his eyes and his thoughts were alike deeply buried?

In order to solve this problem, the spectator would not even have required to approach him; he might have guessed the whole thing by the movement of his head, a certain mysterious inflection in his voice, — an inflection which was as far as possible from that suited to the psalmody of the church, and was marvellously like that sort of sing-song which was in vogue on the stage at this

time. In fact, his suspicion would have become certainty at sight of certain gestures which imprudently disclosed to view the novice's arm and fingers, — not like the mild-mannered arm and benevolent fingers of a priest delivering a discourse, but, rather, like the threatening arm and clenched fingers of an actor playing his part.

For above half an hour the novice had been chanting and gesticulating thus, when the hasty entrance of a stranger who appeared at the church door, and whose nervous, precipitate steps resounded upon the flags, interrupted the performer, and caused him to change his gesture from the biceps to the wrist; that joint and the patella being the only ones which the faithful might exercise within the walls of the church, — the latter being brought into play in the process of genuflexion, and the other in going through with the *mea culpa*.

II.

WHEREIN APPEARS THE ACCURACY OF THE OLD FRENCH PROVERB, "THE COAT DOES NOT MAKE THE MONK."

THE new-comer was a man of some twenty-eight or thirty years, of nervous and sickly appearance, pale, tall of stature, graceful of movement, and of distinguished bearing; well dressed, and yet in a sort of careless way which did not lack charm, and was half-way between the *déshabillé* of a nobleman and the *négligé* of an artist. Evidently very deeply preoccupied by painful thoughts, he was crushing his hat under his arm, as he passed a white well-kept hand through his hair, which was wet with perspiration.

His attractive face, sweet and tinged with melancholy, wore an expression of anxiety and distraction which the novice would have observed except for the assiduous pains he had taken to look neither to right nor left, from the stranger's first appearance upon the scene.

After hastily entering the church, and stopping for a moment to look about him, the stranger seemed to collect his somewhat anxious thoughts again, and began to pace rapidly up and down and back and forth, until his glance fell upon the novice, whereupon he made straight for him.

The novice, guessing at his course rather than seeing it, quickly closed his double book, buried his face in his

clasped hands, and hypocritically feigned to be absorbed in fervent prayer.

Meanwhile the new-comer had drawn so near as almost to touch the shoulder of the novice, who pretended to return to the earth at that instant from the gulf of piety in which he had been swallowed up.

"Pardon, my brother, if I disturb your devotions," said the stranger, opening the conversation.

"My brother," the novice replied, rising to his feet, and carelessly holding the book behind him, "I am at your service."

"Listen, my brother, to what brings me hither. I desire to have a confessor; that is my reason for approaching you and breaking in upon your prayers, for which I most humbly ask your pardon."

"Alas! I am only a novice," the young man rejoined; "and as I have not received holy orders, I cannot hear confession. You must see one of our fathers."

"Yes, yes, that is what I would like," cried the stranger, martyrizing his hat more than ever; "yes, that is what I must do,—see one of the fathers. Would you do me the favor to introduce me to the presence of the one who you think would be able to grant me a few moments, or to bring him here to me?"

"It is just the dinner-hour, and all the fathers are in the refectory at this moment."

"Oh, the devil!" exclaimed the unknown, with visible dissatisfaction. "All in the refectory! oh, the devil!"

The next moment he seemed to realize that he had been invoking the enemy of mankind in the sacred precincts.

"What have I said?" he cried. "Forgive me, O my God!"

He made a quick, almost stealthy sign of the cross.

"This little difficulty about procuring a confessor

seems to disturb you, my brother," said the novice, with awakened interest.

"Oh, yes, yes, indeed it does."

"You are in great haste, then?"

"In very great haste."

"How unfortunate that I am only a novice!"

"Yes, it is unfortunate. But you are almost old enough to be ordained, and you soon will be — and then, then — Ah, my brother, my brother, how happy I esteem your lot!"

"Happy! why, pray?" asked the novice, naïvely.

"Because within a year you will have attained the goal for which every Christian soul should strive, — I mean, salvation; and meanwhile, living here in the Jesuit novitiate, you have the privilege of confessing your sins to these worthy fathers when you choose, and as often as you choose."

"Ah, yes, that is very true; when I choose, and as often as I choose," the novice returned, with a sigh which implied that he did not value at the same figure as the stranger the distinguished favor he had received from above.

"And then, too," the stranger continued with growing enthusiasm, "here you are at home; this church, this altar, these consecrated vessels, all are yours."

The novice cast upon his interlocutor a look of wonder which was not wholly without uneasiness. It was clear that he began to be apprehensive that he had to do with a man whose brain was somewhat unhinged.

But the stranger went on, becoming more and more earnest in his speech,—

"This coat is yours; this rosary, it is yours also; and this book, this holy book in which you may read from morn till night, it too is yours."

As he uttered these words in an impassioned voice, he shook the novice so energetically by the arm that the hand at the end of the arm let fall the much belauded book, at the same time that the brochure we have described fell from its hiding-place.

When he saw the two thus separated, the novice pounced upon the brochure in a frenzy of fear, and buried it in the mysterious depths of one of the pockets of his cassock; and then, still quaking with apprehension, he picked up the book.

That done, he glanced timidly at the unknown. But he had taken no note of what had happened, so absorbing was the religious exaltation to which he had worked himself up.

The eyes of the two met, and almost at the same moment the unknown grasped both the novice's hands.

"See, my dear brother," he cried, "I see that it was God who led me to your church, and the hand of Providence which put you upon my path; you inspire me with the most loving trust. Pardon this expansiveness in a man who is much to be pitied; but in truth your face gives me courage."

Indeed the novice's face, of which we have as yet said nothing, was one of the most attractive faces imaginable, and hence well deserved the eulogium which it received.

"You say that you are unhappy, my brother, and wish to confess?" repeated the novice.

"Yes, I am indeed unhappy!" cried the unknown. "Oh, yes, I would indeed like to confess."

"Is it that you have had the misfortune to commit some sin?"

"Some sin! Ah, my whole life is one long sin,—a sin which lasts from morning till night!" cried the unknown,

with a sigh, which seemed to indicate that his contrition left little to be desired.

"I am speaking to a malefactor, then?" the young man asked with something like terror.

"Oh, yes, to a malefactor, a great malefactor."

In spite of himself, the young man recoiled a step.

"Judge yourself," the unknown continued with a despairing gesture; "I am an actor!"

"An actor!" cried the young man, most affably, and drawing near as the unfortunate artist drew away in his turn, as if, after the avowal he had made, he was no longer fit to touch his fellow-mortals, — "you an actor!"

"*Mon Dieu!* yes."

"Ah, you are an actor!"

The young man continued to approach.

"What!" exclaimed the artist; "you know what I am, and yet you do not shun me as one shuns a leper?"

"Why, no," said the novice; "for my part, I have no hatred for actors." And he added, in so low a tone that his interlocutor could not hear, "Quite the contrary."

"What!" the artist repeated; "you do not turn away in disgust at sight of a heretic, a man who is damned and outside the pale of the church?"

"No."

"Ah, you are so young still! but some day — "

"My brother," said the novice, "I am not of those whose hatred springs from prejudice."

"Alas! my brother," the artist rejoined, "actors are guilty of original sin, — simple in other cases, but double, triple, quadruple in mine, for I am the son, grandson, and great-grandson of comedians. If I am damned, it will be partly on account of Adam and Eve."

"I don't quite understand you," replied the novice, with much curiosity.

"I mean, my brother, that I am an actor by birth, and that I shall be damned on account of my father and mother, my grandfather and grandmother, and in short, all my paternal and maternal ancestors to the third and fourth generation; in a word, Monsieur, my name is Champmeslé!"

The novice's eyes opened to their fullest extent, their expression of profound astonishment having a slight admixture of admiration.

"What! Monsieur," he cried, forgetting the fraternal form of address customarily used in the religious orders, "can it be that you are the grandson of the famous comedienne?"

"I am, Monsieur. Ah, my poor grandmother! A well-damned woman she!"

"In that case your grandfather was the comedian Champmeslé, who always played the kings."

"You have said aright. Marie Desmares, my grandmother, married Charles Chevillet, Sieur de Champmeslé; he had succeeded the celebrated Latorillière at the Hôtel de Bourgogne. His wife made her début in the rôle of Hermione, which had been played so superbly by La Desœuillet, whom she succeeded."

"So that your father," the novice continued eagerly,— "so that your father was Joseph Champmeslé, who played the valets, and your mother Marie Descombes, the first young woman?"

"Just so. But tell me, my brother," cried Champmeslé, in amazement, "do you know that you seem to be pretty well posted in affairs behind the scenes for a Jesuit novice?"

"Monsieur," replied the young man, alarmed at having thus yielded to the attraction which the conversation had for him, "although we are so far removed from the world,

we always have an idea of what is going on there; besides, I was not born at the Jesuits', and my early education was given me at home."

"To whom have I the honor of speaking, my brother?"

"My name is Jacques Bannière, unworthy novice."

Champmeslé courteously saluted his new acquaintance, who no less courteously returned his salutation.

III.

ACTOR AND JESUIT.

THE conversation continued, quite naturally becoming, with each word, more interesting for both participants.

"So you desire to confess?" said Bannière, returning to the point at which Champmeslé began the foregoing digression apropos of his ancestors.

"*Mon Dieu!* yes, my brother, and these are my reasons. You, who have some acquaintance with the history of my family, are probably aware that my grandfather was a close friend of Monsieur Racine?"

"So I have understood, and of Monsieur La Fontaine too," Bannière hastened to reply, blushing as he remembered the legend which connected those two names somewhat lightly with that of Marie Desmares, wife of the elder Champmeslé.

"Although he was a second-rate tragedian, perhaps because of his limitations in that respect, my grandfather was a man of much wit, and therein had the advantage of his father, Monsieur Chevillet, of whom you may have heard perhaps?"

"No, Monsieur," returned Bannière, timidly, ashamed that his familiarity with the Champmeslé pedigree stopped at the third generation.

"Ah! but my great-grandfather, Chevillet, who was also a comedian, had all the intellectual ability of my great-great-grandfather, a very affable and pious poet, who wrote mysteries, and played in them too at need."

"Really!" cried Bannière, in amazement; "a poet and comedian at once, like Monsieur Molière?"

"*Mon Dieu*, yes! Only observe, I pray, that those words which I emphasized in speaking of him, 'a very affable and pious poet,' serve to distinguish him from Monsieur Molière, who was ill-tempered and a scoffer."

"Yes, Monsieur, I certainly will observe that distinction, and will remember it, I promise you, when the time comes for me to remember it. But meanwhile, Monsieur, why will you not take a seat? Our fathers will be at table for a quarter of an hour yet, and there is no reason why you should remain standing."

"None at all, Monsieur — pardon me, I should say 'my brother.' I gladly accept a seat and the pleasure of further conversation with you, if you are not wearied by my loquacity."

"Wearied indeed! Pray believe, on the contrary, Monsieur, that I am exceedingly interested in what you say. We were speaking of your grandfather."

"Of my grandfather, that is true; so we will return to my grandfather, and you will see that I do not indulge in meaningless digressions."

"Oh, I am sure of that!"

"I was saying that Chevillet de Champmeslé, my grandfather —"

"He who played the kings' parts?"

"Yes, the friend of Monsieur Racine."

"And Monsieur La Fontaine?"

"And of Monsieur La Fontaine, that's the man. I was about to say, then, that Chevillet de Champmeslé had known much sorrow and disappointment in his life. In the first place, the loss of his wife, who died in 1694, and then of Monsieur Racine, who died in 1699. I say nothing of the loss of Monsieur La Fontaine, who preceded

both the others, dying the death of a most exemplary Christian in 1693."

"By the way, did not your grandfather collaborate with Monsieur La Fontaine, and write with him four comedies: 'Le Florentin,' 'La Coupe Enchantée,' 'Le Veau Perdu," and 'Je vous prends sans vert,' I think?"

"Monsieur, while I admire your profound erudition in dramatic matters, which continues to arouse my wonder on the part of a novice, I must tell you that my own belief is that good La Fontaine good-naturedly, and to pay a compliment to my grandfather, allowed it to be said in society, that they worked together."

"Ah, yes!"

"It was like this: my grandfather allowed him to become one of his family, and La Fontaine allowed my grandfather to get some of the credit for his work."

Bannière blushed imperceptibly.

"So you say," he rejoined, "that your grandfather had known sorrow; the death of his wife and of Monsieur La Fontaine and Monsieur Racine."

"To these sources of chagrin," continued Champmeslé, "we must add the very moderate success, I might even say, the dead failure of certain pieces, which he wrote without assistance, such as 'L'Heure du Berger,' 'La Rue Saint-Denis,' and 'Le Parisien;' a man can but be fatigued, who keeps falling from time to time, especially when his fall is in five acts, and in verse at that. In short, my grandfather, after 1700, became very moody and sullen, like Louis XIV.; he was taciturn, almost dumb, and dreamed from sunrise to sunset. The trouble came, my brother, when Champmeslé, from being a day-dreamer, fell into the way of dreaming at night, and in his dreams saw La Champmeslé, his wife, and Mademoiselle Chevillet, his mother, who, with faces of ghostly

pallor, leaning upon one another with a grieved and threatening expression, made each a beckoning motion with the finger, which means, 'Come with us.'"

"Ah, *mon Dieu!*" Bannière interjected.

"Monsieur, that happened on a Friday night in the month of August, 1700. This dream made so deep an impression upon my grandfather's mind that it was as if it had really happened; go where he would, from that moment his eyes always saw the sweet face of La Champmeslé, surrounded with raven-hued tresses, and the stern countenance of Madame Chevillet with its frame of gray hair, and their melancholy smile, and their mournful gesture; so that he sang incessantly on all occasions,

'Adieu, paniers, vendanges sont faites.' [1]

Now, just at that time, Monsieur, my grandfather had played Agamemnon before Louis XIV., and the king had done him the honor to say to him after the performance: 'Well, Champmeslé! you still act as atrociously as ever, do you not?' In his capacity as a man of sense my grandfather had always had a similar estimate of his own histrionic ability, and he then determined to give up the kingly rôles, and take the first comic old man."

"Allow me to say, Monsieur, that if your grandfather was really so distressed as you say by the successive blows which fate had dealt him, the moment was ill chosen to assume comic old men's parts."

"You are quite right, Monsieur; and many people who saw the poor devil in that line of parts have told me that they could imagine nothing more incongruous than the combination of such buffoonery with that despairing countenance. He wept so bitterly, in making others laugh, that his heart was broken, and he had to return to such rôles

[1] "Adieu, hampers, the grapes are gathered."

as Agamemnon, which one can always play with safet , though one be stupid beyond belief."

"Ah! then one can play Agamemnon and the like whe one is stupid?" asked Bannière, innocently.

"*Dame!* my brother, look at the men who play those parts. — Ah! forgive me, I forgot that novices cannot go to the play."

"Alas!" murmured Bannière, looking up towards the roof.

"Well, then! the proof of what I say is that my grandfather played that line for nearly a year after he had the dream, and during that year was hissed only five or six times; which brings us down to 1701, and the end of my story. But pardon me, my brother, I think you are going to lose your handkerchief."

Indeed something white, which might in the half-light of the chapel be taken for linen, was protruding from Bannière's pocket. It was the accursed little book which he had stowed away so carefully, but which was showing its nose again in spite of all he could do.

The novice hurriedly crushed it in his hand, and resumed, —

"In 1701, you were saying, my brother?"

"In 1701, on the same nineteenth day of August, my grandfather again saw his wife and mother in a dream, paler and more doleful than before, and persistently repeating the same sign."

"Imagination, doubtless," muttered the Jesuit apprentice.

"Not at all, but reality, my brother, reality. He awoke; he opened his eyes; he lighted his float light, his candle, his lamp; he rattled his spoon against his glass of *eau sucrée*, and still, still, despite the float-light, the candle, and the lamp, despite the noise, he saw in the

darkest corner of his apartment those two women, the young and the old, bending those fateful forefingers, and saying with finger and head and smile, 'Come with us, come with us!'"

"That was frightful," said Bannière, as he felt the perspiration on his brow.

"I must tell you that it was fatal too," said the artist, assenting, as we see, to Bannière's characterization. "Monsieur de Champmeslé rose at once, and rushed off in the middle of the night, half dressed, to arouse his friends, and tell them what had happened.

"Some of them, false friends, laughingly showed him the door; others, with more consideration, used words of consolation, citing examples of dreams that never were realized, and trying to persuade him that his was of that sort; one only, a true friend he, made him pass the night with him, and talked with him till dawn of the beautiful and good Marie Desmares, and of the virtuous Mademoiselle Chevillet de Champmeslé, his mother, and succeeded in persuading him, or very nearly that, that two such estimable individuals could not possibly wish any ill to him who was the son of one and the husband of the other.

"So long as Champmeslé was in bed with his friend or in his presence, he was somewhat reassured, as we have said; but the blow was struck. He had scarcely left his comforter when the same thoughts came back to him. It was a Sunday, and they were playing Racine's 'Iphigénie,' preceded by some little piece which I can't now recall. While the latter was in progress, my grandfather, in Greek costume, was walking up and down the foyer. His helmet was pulled over his eyes, and his velvet coat of mail was all bespangled with tears, which, like liquid diamonds, were streaming down to his very

buskins. And it was pitiful to hear him humming away at his eternal refrain, which grew more lugubrious every day: 'Adieu, paniers, vendanges sont faites.' Everybody who heard that doleful strain said to himself, '*Mon Dieu*, a melancholy Ulysses Champmeslé will be to-night.'"

"Ulysses is not exactly a side-splitting part at best," said Bannière, phlegmatically, although stirred to the lowest depths by this narrative.

"Side-splitting or not, Monsieur, I assure you that the part was played in an awe-inspiring fashion that day. Baron, who was playing Achilles, lost command of himself; and Sallé, who was the Agamemnon, and who had been at sword's-points with Baron for a month, replied in spite of himself when the latter asked him, —

'Seigneur, qu'a donc cet bruit qui vous doive étonner?'[1]

'Is Champmeslé ill?'"

"Whereas," Bannière interrupted, "his proper reply is:

'Juste ciel! Saurait-il mon funeste artifice?'"[2]

"Right again. But upon my word, my brother, I find you exceedingly well informed in these matters."

"Yes, I was taught all that at home," rejoined Bannière, modestly.

"The performance at an end," resumed Champmeslé, "my grandfather had no idea of going to bed and trying to sleep. He was too much afraid that as soon as his eyes were closed, possibly while they were still open, he should see his wife and mother again. He wandered about the streets, careful not to glance into the dark corners; and in the morning, when the church doors were

[1] "Noble sir, what is there in this uproar to cause you astonishment?"

[2] "Great Heaven! Can it be that he is aware of my baleful stratagem?"

open, he gave thirty sous to the sacristan of Saint-Eustache to pay for a Mass each for his mother and his wife.

"'I owe you ten sous, then,' said the sacristan.

"'No, for I want you to say a third Mass for me. Keep it all.'"

"A persistent man, that grandfather of yours," said the novice.

"Ah! you will see that he did well to be persistent," the artist rejoined.

"On returning to the Hôtel de la Comédie where the players sometimes lunched before rehearsal, the first person whom Champmeslé met was Baron.

"Baron joked him upon his sinister expression. But nothing could remove the lines from my grandfather's brow; at each of Baron's witticisms he shook his head with an air which seemed to say, —

"'Ah, if you only knew!'

"Baron understood.

"'You have real cause for suffering, then?' he asked.

"'A real cause! *Morbleu*, I should say so!' was my grandfather's reply; 'the very greatest that I ever had in my life.'

"And he muttered beneath his breath, 'Come with us, come with us.'

"'After all, however great your grief,' said Baron, trying to sustain the conversation upon a level of pleasantry,

'Ta douleur, Champmeslé, ne peut etre éternelle.'[1]

"'Ah!' said my grandfather; 'it will do just that, for it will end only with my life.'

"'Come, tell me what it is; if it is such a serious matter as that, I desire to know it.'

[1] "Thy sorrow, Champmeslé, cannot endure forever."

"'You wish to know it?'

"'Yes.'

"'Well, I am unhappy to know that you are on bad terms with Sallé.'

"'Ah! I should say so! A scoundrel who insists that I am growing old, and goes about telling everybody so.'

"'He is wrong; one is as old as one seems to be, and you look barely thirty.'

"'You see, then, that he is a villain, a scamp, a miserable wretch.'

"'Whatever you please, Baron; but I do not want to die knowing that you two are at enmity; and as that must soon happen —'

"'What! what must soon happen?'

"'My death.'

"'Very well, then; as you say. I will make up with Sallé the day of your death, old fellow,' said Baron.

"'Do it now, then, for it will be to-day,' rejoined my grandfather.

"And notwithstanding all Baron's *ifs* and *buts* and *fors*, for he was not easily persuaded, my grandfather compelled him to enter the cabaret.

"Sallé was sitting there at lunch.

"My grandfather compelled Baron to sit opposite his enemy, and took his place between them."

"At table," remarked Bannière, "melancholy thoughts vanish."

"Ah! young man, young man," cried the actor, sadly, "you will soon see how greatly mistaken you are! Although sitting at the same table, Baron and Sallé continued to sulk, and showed their teeth a little at first. But without relaxing his sepulchral expression for an instant, Monsieur de Champmeslé poured so much good wine into their stomachs that they finally softened.

Quick to observe that their hearts were touched, my grandfather took a hand of each, and put one in the other upon the table; then, as if his duties in this world were accomplished, and as if nothing remained for him to do on earth, he let his head fall in his hands."

"It may be," said Bannière, "that he hid himself thus because of the vision which pursued him."

"Ah! that suggestion proves you to be a youth of discernment," said the actor, "for it was just that. In the position he had assumed, my grandfather seemed to be shedding all the tears that his body could hold.

"'Good,' said Sallé; 'Champmeslé is weeping now that he has made us laugh.'

"'That 's not it,' said Baron, jocosely. 'Champmeslé undertook to die if he was fortunate enough to reconcile us to one another; he has reconciled us, and now he is dying, *pardieu!*'

"My grandfather heaved a sigh which had an uncanny sound. The two friends looked at one another and fell to shuddering involuntarily.

"Then they looked at Champmeslé. His immobility, which was so absolute that there was no symptom of breathing, terrified them. His head was still between his hands. Baron took away one hand and Sallé the other, and his head fell forward, face down upon the table; his cheeks were bloodless, his eyes staring, and his mouth tightly closed He was dead."

"Oh, Monsieur," cried Bannière, "that is a heart-rending tale!"

"Is it not, my brother?" returned the artist, sighing deeply.

"But all this," continued Bannière, who had a logical cast of mind, — "all this does not make clear to me why you want to confess."

"Why — But understand, my dear brother, I pray you, that we Champmeslés die suddenly. My grandfather, as you have just heard, died suddenly, my grandmother died suddenly, my father died suddenly; and each of the three immediately after their respective first appearances in new parts, — for this was the first time that my grandfather had played 'Ulysses,' having given up the rôle of 'Agamemnon,' to Sallé, who had long been ambitious to play it. So, you see, with every rôle that I play for the first time I quake with fear, lest I die suddenly, like my father, my grandfather, my grandmother — "

"But are you now on the point of making one of these first appearances?" asked Bannière, timidly.

"Alas! yes, my brother," replied Champmeslé, with a despondent gesture.

"When?"

"To-morrow."

"To-morrow, did you say?"

"Yes, to-morrow."

"What part are you to play?"

"Oh! a very difficult one."

"What is it?"

"Hérode."

"Hérode! What! Hérode in Monsieur de Voltaire's 'Hérode et Mariamne!'" cried Bannière, leaping back, and clapping his hands in amazement.

"Oh, don't blame me for it, I beg!" said the artist, in a pitiful tone; "I am in despair."

"You are in despair at the idea of playing this part, and yet you play it?" exclaimed Bannière, somewhat at a loss to explain this apparent inconsistency.

"*Mon Dieu!* yes," cried Champmeslé; "an inexplicable anomaly, is it not? But so it is. What can I do?

Nothing, for I have all the family superstition; sometimes thoughts come to my mind in this connection — "

"What thoughts?"

"Thoughts which I cannot put into words because they involve casting a stain upon my grandmother's good name."

"Tell me what you mean; I am not all the world, and your thoughts will be sacred."

"It sometimes comes into my head that I am not really the grandson of my grandfather."

"Nonsense!"

"It comes into my head that this rage which I have for the stage, and the result of which is that when I am not acting I think I am denying my birth, and when I am acting I think I am damned, is due to the fact that my blood is, as they say in heraldic language, in equal parts actor and author. In the old days there was gossip because Monsieur Racine wrote all my grandmother's favorite rôles. There was no less talk because Monsieur La Fontaine allowed my grandfather to write his name beside his. Ah! if it be as I suspect, I should be damned on other grounds, being the grandson of an actress and of a man who wrote love tragedies."

"But," said Bannière, innocently, "there are as many chances that you are the grandson of Monsieur La Fontaine as of Monsieur Racine."

"That would be much worse, for then I should be descended from an actress and a man who wrote very immoral stories."

"This is indeed a case of conscience," said Bannière; "but it is not for us to discuss it, and as soon as one of our reverend fathers shall have left the table — "

"Oh, yes, a confessor, a confessor!" cried Champmeslé, — "a confessor who will tell me the end of all this; a

confessor who will tell me whether I am the grandson of Monsieur Chevillet, Monsieur Racine, or Monsieur La Fontaine; a confessor who will tell me if one must necessarily be damned when one is the son, grandson, and great-grandson of an actor. Oh for a confessor, a confessor, a confessor; for I am going to play a new part to-morrow, and I want to confess *in articulo mortis.*"

"Calm yourself, pray, my dear brother; you are not old enough to fear such a catastrophe."

"Ah! how blessed you seem to me, you holy men," cried Champmeslé; "how blessed do I esteem your lot, who have neither white nor red paint to lay upon your cheeks as in 'Pyramus and Thisbe,' nor false beard to attach to your chin, as in 'Hérode;' how blessed do I esteem your lot, who, instead of being triply descended from actors, are Jesuits all, from father to son."

"Monsieur!" exclaimed Bannière, "what's that you say? *Jesuits from father to son!* Why, you are mad, my very dear brother."

"Pardon, pardon, a thousand pardons; but you see, when I am about to appear in a new rôle, I no longer know what I do or say. 'Jesuit from father to son,'—of course I know that is not possible. Oh, permit me to give you a Christian embrace, my brother, to be sure that you forgive me."

He proceeded to embrace the novice so heartily, and pressed him so affectionately in his arms, that the famous brochure, which seemed to have an unconquerable ambition to bask in the daylight, leaped out of Bannière's pocket once more, and fell full into the hands of Champmeslé, who involuntarily read upon the titlepage the words—

"HÉRODE ET MARIAMNE.

Tragedy in Five Acts. By Monsieur Arouet de Voltaire."

IV.

THE SACRIFICE OF ABRAHAM.

THE amazement consequent upon this discovery, and the muttered comment which amazement called forth from the scruple-ridden actor, who had just laid his whole heart bare before Bannière, would have humiliated the novice beyond expression, if an unexpected event had not diverted his thoughts from what had taken place.

This unexpected event was the appearance of a Jesuit father at the end of the little passage-way which led, as has been said, from the novitiate into the church.

With this appearance all Bannière's self-possession returned.

"Silence, for mercy's sake, Monsieur Champmeslé," he exclaimed; "here comes one of our fathers into the chapel."

In order to make short work of any suspicions which the father might conceive, Bannière rushed to meet him, crying, —

"Reverend sir, if it please you, Monsieur who is here desires to be heard in confession."

The Jesuit continued to walk towards the two young men.

"Hide the book," Bannière whispered to the actor; "hide the book, pray hide it!"

Bannière forgot that it was in no way surprising that an actor should have a copy of a comedy or a tragedy in his hand.

Nevertheless the artist hastened to comply with Bannière's entreaties, and put the hand which held the book behind his back. But while he accomplished that manœuvre with the precision and address of an actor to whom all means should be familiar, he fixed his gaze with deep attention upon him who was drawing near; for that man was to become his judge.

"It seems to me that he has a good face," said Champmeslé in an undertone to Bannière.

"Oh, yes, he is one of the kindest and most indulgent," Bannière replied, "and at the same time one of our most learned professors: it is Père de la Sante."

It may be that in imparting a slightly louder pitch to his voice Bannière intended to be overheard by the priest, and in this way to disarm his wrath by flattery,—which might be esteemed the more delicate, as it was not addressed directly to the one for whom it was destined, but reached him on the rebound as it were.

Père de la Sante, upon receiving the information that the unknown who was talking with Bannière was a penitent waiting for him, turned aside from his course towards the young men, and directed his steps towards a confessional, motioning to Champmeslé to follow him.

Champmeslé bowed affectionately to Bannière, and as he did so found a way to return to him without being seen the profane volume which had so inconveniently fallen from his pocket.

But as he handed it to him, he could not forbear saying to him in a voice overflowing with kind feeling:

"Oh, my dearest brother, why do you risk the destruction of your soul when you are in so good a position to procure salvation?"

This orthodox advice, however, did not seem to have effect upon the novice; for as soon as he was sure

that neither confessor nor penitent was spying upon him, he went eagerly at his reading of "Hérode et Mariamne" once more; nor did he cease until Champmeslé, absolved and blessed, left the confessional and the church, as lightly as a cork rises to the surface of the water when relieved of the lead which had held it down.

The Jesuit followed him from the confessional; but as he very considerately coughed and expectorated before coming out, Bannière had ample opportunity to expect him, to see him coming, and to allow him to approach without endangering the precious brochure.

Let us say a word of Père de la Sante, who at this time enjoyed very high repute in Paris and the provinces; entirely scholastic, be it understood, confined within the four walls of the Jesuit colleges, and denied by the other religious orders, all of which were madly jealous of the one with which we have to do, and which had made such enormous headway in so short a time.

Père de la Sante was a fat man of florid habit, with bushy gray eyebrows which gave him a crabbed look, which was abundantly atoned for, in the eyes of the physiognomist, by the soft blue of his eyes, and the frankness of his thick lips.

He was a rare type of man, — a scholar steeped in poetry, an ancient philosopher, who, instead of studying Plato and Socrates as curiosities, took them as his masters, allotting to the gloomy schools of modern theology the restricted place in his studies which the practical man allots to elaborate theories. A good Christian withal, a zealous but tolerant Catholic, he was slow to allow himself to be provoked to harsh measures; and he saw in Bossuet, as well as in the Cardinal de Noailles, admirable subjects for Latin verses.

It was to this benignant Jesuit that Bannière, some-

what preoccupied by thoughts of his interview with Champmeslé, proceeded to offer the humble but dignified respect which every novice owes to his superior.

But Bannière had an object in view; he was anxious for enlightenment as to Champmeslé's apprehension of eternal damnation, and his desire was so eager that one might suppose that it had some other basis than his love for his neighbor simply, and that, in fact, Bannière, an obedient slave of the decrees of the Church, at that moment really loved his neighbor as himself, and more than that, — that he loved himself as his neighbor.

And so, when he had made his reverence to the Jesuit, he said, —

"It seemed to me, my father, that your penitent went away with a very light step."

"The step is always light, my child, when the conscience is light," was the Jesuit's reply.

"So, then, I may believe that you gave the poor fellow absolution."

"Yes, my son, upon performing a trifling penance which he promised faithfully to perform."

"Yet it seemed to me," Bannière persisted, "from certain words which he let fall in conversation, that this man was an actor."

"Yes, my son, so he is," said Père de la Sante, looking wonderingly at Bannière. "What then?"

"Why, then, it seemed to me, my father, that since all actors are excommunicate, it would be useless to give him absolution."

Père de la Sante, with all his learning, seemed somewhat embarrassed for a reply.

"Excommunicate! excommunicate!" he repeated; "to be sure, actors are excommunicate, except in case of version and repentance."

"Ah, yes," Bannière said; "and as he has repented and become converted, no doubt — "

"He gave me the impression," retorted Père de la Sante, "that he was a perfectly honest man."

"Oh, to be sure."

"Do you not agree with me, my son?"

"Indeed, yes, in every respect."

"You talked with him quite a long while, I think?" Père de la Sante asked, interrogating Bannière with his eyes.

"I cannot say just how long I talked with him," the novice replied, with that skill in evading a direct response which the least remarkable disciple of the school of Loyola soon acquires.

"At all events, however little talk you had with him, my son, you must have noticed the elevation of his sentiments?"

"Yes, my father; and yet, I always believed that excommunication made all that of no account, unless there was abjuration and repentance."

Père de la Sante scratched the end of his nose with his forefinger, a process which his intimate friends recognized as an infallible sign of embarrassment.

"There are clear distinctions in the actor's profession," he replied; "tragedy, for example, is one of the least dangerous branches."

Bannière smiled as if he saw that Père de la Sante had given him an opening to get the better of the argument.

Père de la Sante noticed the smile, no doubt, and interpreted it as we have done; for he added quickly,—

"I mean Latin tragedy especially."

"Yes, yes, tragedies like those which you compose yourself; 'The Sacrifice of Abraham,' for instance, — 'Abrahami Sacrificium.'"

"Yes, like that, my son, or like my other tragedy, 'Les Héritiers,'" said the Jesuit, with a modest blush.

"I do not know the last, my father."

"I will give it you, my son."

"It is very true," added the novice, "that in tragedies dealing with sacred subjects, composed with a pious and moral purpose — "

"And played by young men," broke in Père de la Sante, growing warm as every poet does in speaking of his own work, "to the exclusion of every earthly emotion which requires to be interpreted by the other sex."

"Besides, my father," said Bannière, "such tragedies are not really theatrical pieces, but poems."

"I have never even ventured to write iambics," continued the Jesuit poet, "lest they should too nearly resemble those of Terence and Seneca. As for the metre, my son, as for the metre — oh, well! in my judgment, such works ought to please God rather than to displease him."

"The fact is," said Bannière, seconding the poet's enthusiasm, — "the fact is, that the part of Isaac is a very beautiful one."

"If I remember aright, it was you who played it, my son."

"Yes, you were kind enough to select me from among all my comrades."

"As the one whose head was most in keeping with the part. You played that part very well, did you know it?"

"Ah, my father, that was three years ago; and now — "

Bannière made a motion of the head, which signified, "Now, it would be very different. — But then," he

continued, "how could one help but recite well such lines as this,—

'Si placet innocuo firmatum sanguine fœdus
Jungere —'"

"Indeed you did not say that line badly then, but you say it better now. Ah! you have remembered my remark as to the word 'placet.' You pronounced it badly, like a man of the North; while you, on the contrary, are from —"

"Toulouse, my father."

"Ah! the men of the North may play French tragedies well, but they will never learn to play Latin tragedies; for them there are no long or short syllables, no consonants or vowels; for instance, 'placet' consists of two short syllables, does it not?"

"Yes, my father; for 'si placet' is a dactyl."

"Very well! you pronounced 'placet' formerly as if 'pla' were a long syllable. I called your attention to it, and you have corrected it. Abraham also made a similar mistake in pronunciation. But that was natural enough, for he was from Rouen. Let me see; it was in this invocation:

'O qui terrarum spatia immensum Pelagusque
Œternis regis impertis —'

Do you remember that?"

"'Et fulmine terras,'" Bannière completed the line.

"Ah! you have a very good memory, my son," cried the delighted Jesuit.

"It 's not difficult to remember such admirable lines! Oh, the part of Abraham was a fine one too! All the parts were fine. I would have liked to play all of them."

"I am very much pleased that you remember the first line, which does not lack a certain grandeur,"

said Père de la Sante, whose vanity was flattered; "throwing the cæsura back to the third foot in a word composed of three long syllables is an original idea, and the 'Pelagusque' is somewhat picturesque."

"It is superb!" cried Bannière.

"I do not boast of the second line as my own," continued the Jesuit, modestly; "for it is Virgil's, and I transplanted it bodily, in the first place because it came into my head, and secondly because I thought I could not improve upon it. But, to return to the misplaced accent of the young man who played Abraham, he pronounced 'regis,' which is certainly composed of two short syllables, and means 'thou commandest,' as if it had been 'regis,' meaning 'of the king,' in which case one syllable would certainly have been long, and the other doubtful. But we have gone a long way from the subject of our conversation," suddenly exclaimed the poet, whose mind, after three years, was still intent upon the false accents of his pupils. That is easily excused, happily; for a sonorous Latin verse is such a fine thing! "We were saying, as nearly as I can remember, that there is no great risk, I might even say no risk at all, in playing Latin pieces."

"Yes, my father; but this good Monsieur de Champmeslé, whom you have just confessed, does not act in Latin, but in French; he does not recite sacred poetry, but the profanest of the profane."

"That makes a difference, as the late great king used to say," rejoined Père de la Sante; "that is why I would not say that the poor devil, so long as he acts in French tragedies, can be in a state of grace; for," he added, shaking his head, "these French tragedies are a very suspicious branch of the drama, since that abominable Arouet has taken a hand in writing them!"

At these words a shudder shook the frame of the novice, and he hastily carried his eyes as well as his hand to his pocket, to make sure that it was not betraying him again.

In all probability Père de la Sante failed to notice the agitation of the novice, for he went on: —

"There 's a fellow, that Monsieur Arouet de Voltaire, who is hardly in a state of grace; and yet," he added with a sigh, "with Père Porée's help, what a fine Jesuit he would have made, — that rascal Arouet!"

Bannière nearly lost his balance as he saw the crockery-ware eyes of Père de la Sante brighten up, and his eyebrows bristle.

This time his fright was so evident that it attracted the attention of the Jesuit, whose mind suddenly received a ray of light.

"But how is it with you," he said bluntly to the novice, — "you, of whom we have said nothing? Is it possible that you are dreaming about acting?"

"You do not forget, my father, that you yourself assigned me the rôle of Isaac," said Bannière, deprecatingly.

"Yes; but that was in the 'Sacrifice of Abraham,' a Latin tragedy. That is not what I refer to."

"My father — "

"Are you thinking about acting in French tragedy?"

"Oh, my father," cried the novice, "you have always been so kind to me that I should never dream of lying to you."

"Mendax omnis homo!"[1] cried Père de la Sante, sententiously.

"Every wicked man!" added Bannière, quickly; "but I am not a wicked man, and consequently am not dis-

[1] "Every man is a liar."

posed to lie. Do you mean to ask me about my inclination?"

"To be sure."

"Well, then, I will answer frankly, my father. Since I played in your 'Sacrifice of Abraham,' since I recited your beautiful lines, and enjoyed the abundant wealth of your ideas combined with the nobility of your sentiments — "

"See how the wretch tries to cast the whole responsibility upon me!" exclaimed Père de la Sante.

"Indeed, I do, my father; and it is no more than just. I had no thought of the stage. Who put it into my head? You. I had no idea what a part in a play was. Who selected me to play Isaac? You. Who superintended my rehearsals, guided me with advice, and encouraged me with applause? You, my father, always you."

"Miserable wretch, what are you saying?"

"I am saying, my father, that if you had written 'The Sacrifice of Abraham' in French instead of Latin — "

"Pshaw!"

"I am saying that at this moment, instead of being performed in a poor Jesuit college, it would be given upon the stage of every theatre in France."

"Nonsense, I say!"

"It would be given before the court at Versailles, and before the king. Oh, what noble French lines might have been made out of such Latin lines, as —

> 'Si placet innocuo firmatum sanguine fœdus
> Jungere —'"

"I have made them, wretched boy!" cried Père de la Sante; and he began to declaim: —

> "'S'il faut, pour consacrer la divine alliance,
> Répandre dans ce jour le sang de l'innocence.'"

But he checked himself.

"*Mon Dieu!*" cried he, "what in Heaven's name was I doing? The truth of the matter is," he continued with a sigh, "I could have composed tragedies in French quite as well as that blackguard Arouet, if I had chosen."

"In that case, my father," said Bannière, who throughout the conversation had let no favorable opening escape him, — "in that case you certainly cannot blame me, you who have written tragedies, for longing to act them. I have always heard it said that there could be no end without a beginning, no effect without a cause. You are the beginning, I am but the end; you are the cause, and I the effect."

"That, my son," retorted Père de la Sante, horrified at the turn the conversation had taken, and especially at the attempt to hold him responsible, — "that is too weighty a question for me to answer *ex abrupto*, — off-hand. To-morrow, day after to-morrow, or on some later day, we will resume our conversation."

"Pardon me, my father, a few moments more," insisted Bannière, seizing the Jesuit by the girdle.

"Not a second!" cried Père de la Sante; "two o'clock is striking, and the reverend principal, Père Mordon, is awaiting my report."

Tearing his girdle from the youth's hands, the author of "The Sacrifice of Abraham" disappeared in the passage, leaving "Isaac" Bannière in the deepest perplexity.

V.

REVEREND PÈRE MORDON.

THE perplexity of the novice was vastly increased by the word "report" which Père de la Sante had uttered.

For this report was the terror of all novices.

In brief, the name was applied to a sort of review, in which the principal received separate reports from each professor employed in or attached to the novitiate, in addition to reports from certain pupils who were more forward than the others in bringing forth into the light of grace, or the grace of light, as you choose, the works of their comrades.

The unfortunate Bannière was well acquainted with this Jesuitical function. Like the Venetian denunciations or the Portuguese inquisition, the "report" of the Jesuits appeared to its victims in the terrifying proportions of the unknown; it was a cloud which was never seen to gather, but from which at a given moment, and generally when it was least expected, thunder and hail came forth, but without either light or smoke.

The custom was, in short, that every word, every thought, every action of the novices should be reported to the implacable tribunal of the principal. The result of the "report," for those who were compromised by it, was first of all a warning, sometimes a stormy explanation; but punishment was inevitable.

It goes without saying that every Jesuit who was interrogated by the principal was expected to give him full and explicit answers to every question, even though

he should thereby compromise those who were nearest and dearest to him, — a friend, a relation, or a brother.

Scarcely had poor Bannière, then, after being abandoned in the church, as we have seen, by Père de la Sante, returned to his cell, when a *cuistre*, as the servants of the establishment were called, opened his door, which novices were under no circumstances allowed to keep locked.

In truth, the novitiate of the Jesuits was a terrible period of trial; the object was to crush and destroy and annihilate that work of nature which we call "man," to substitute for it that slave of an order which goes by the name of "Jesuit." No means was neglected to effect that transformation, from the most intoxicating temptations to the most atrocious barbarity. So one treats wild animals whom one wishes to tame, and who, with that end in view, are deprived of the first three essentials of animal life, — light, food, and sleep.

The stoutest resistance is overborne by darkness, loss of sleep, and hunger. Suppose the novice to be sleeping the sweet, calm sleep of youth; without warning he would be roughly awakened, and with no motive, to no profit, and with no other design than to bend body and mind to passive obedience, he would be ordered to make the circuit of the garden a hundred times or to repeat the service of the Virgin. Suppose him to be at the famishing-point, and just about to sit down to a hearty dinner; as the first morsel was on the way to his mouth, the order would come for him to be present at some conference, two, three, four, or five hours long. If perchance, his longing seemed too eager to enjoy the first rays of the May sun, the first breezes of spring, which seem to come laden with life and health, as with the sweet perfume of the budding plants, they would bury him for a day, for

two days, or perhaps a whole week, in some gloomy cavern, where no air blew upon him save emanations from the tomb, and that subterranean current which moans sadly around the corners of the pillars which uphold the arches of crypts.

At last, when the subjugated soul and mind had no will remaining other than the masterful will which presided over that vast and marvellous association which was called the Society of Jesus, the novice was received into the bosom of the order; and there he became, according to the degree of his ability, his intellect, or his genius, a simple block, a corner-stone, or the very keystone of the arch of the enormous structure built in darkness by black-frocked artisans, who aspired to universal domination.

When the valet appeared upon Bannière's threshold, he had not yet had time to hide his ill-fated "Hérode," and was looking with all his eyes for a corner in which he might stow it away.

The valet interrupted this important proceeding by announcing that the reverend principal had sent for him. Bannière replied only by smoothing out his pocket, and resigning himself to follow.

Two minutes later he found himself in the presence of his superior.

Père Mordon, superior of the Jesuits of Avignon, was physically and morally the most perfect contrast imaginable to Père de la Sante. Tall and thin; pale with the yellow pallor of ivory; possessed of a head which seemed to be all forehead, punctured with two staring eyes, which acquired a brilliancy impossible to endure when they were fixed for a long time upon one; and with a slit of a mouth below his long, straight, pointed nose, — a mouth which seemed to have been gashed with a razor,

so little did the lips protrude, and so closely did they adhere to one another, — such was Père Mordon.

"Immensus fronte, atque oculis bipatentibus."

Bannière had never doted on the society of his superior; on this occasion, we say it without doing him injustice, he had a horror of it.

The Jesuit's forehead seemed doubled in extent; his eyes had the fatal glitter of the eyes of a basilisk; his nose, whiter than usual, kept growing whiter still towards its pointed end; and his closed lips seemed to turn in, instead of protruding.

The Jesuit saw the effect his aspect had produced, and tried to lessen the brilliancy of his eyes in some degree by partly veiling them under their lids.

He made a sign with his finger to Bannière to approach; Bannière obeyed, and did not stop till he reached the table which stood between himself and the superior.

The young novice was pale and trembling; but by the double lines in his forehead, and the drawing together of his eyebrows, it was easy to see that he also was the possessor of a will of his own which would not break without a struggle.

"Bannière," said the Jesuit, sitting in his armchair, like a judge on the bench or an emperor on his throne, "what have you been doing to-day?"

Bannière understood that this form of question, covering the whole day, was really intended to refer to the time he had passed in the church.

"My father," he asked, "where must I begin?"

"Begin with the morning, *secundum ordinem.*"

"Is it really necessary?"

"I do not understand you."

"You only wish to question me upon one solitary point, my father."

"And upon what point do you think that I wish to question you, pray?"

"Upon what I was doing from noon till two o'clock, for example."

"So be it!" said the priest. "You are very clever,—good. I will not question you at all, then. I will accuse you."

"I await your charge, my father."

"Twice before to-day, a tragedy of that villain whose real name is Arouet, but who dubs himself Monsieur de Voltaire, has been found in your cell,—once in your mattress, and the second time under one of the flags."

"Yes, my father; and each time the book was confiscated, and I was punished."

"And each time you have bought another copy."

"It is true, my father."

"So that this morning, while pretending to read your breviary, it was really that devilish work which you were reading in the chapel?"

"I do not deny it."

"Where have you hidden this third copy?"

"I have not hidden it, my father; it is in my pocket, and here it is."

"You give it up to me voluntarily, then, with due repentance, and you promise not to attempt to procure another?"

"I hand it to you voluntarily, my father, but without repentance. As for trying to procure another, it would be useless. I know it by heart."

The superior crumpled the little book in his bony hand, but with undisturbed tranquillity he said,—

"You are persistent, Bannière; *pervicax*."

"Yes, my father," rejoined Bannière; "that is a fault of which I confess that I am guilty."

"It is a good quality, too, my son, when exerted for good objects. Patience, which narrow minds prefer to it, is only a negative virtue; perseverance is well-timed activity; the two qualities in combination in one person are said to denote that that person has a 'calling;' it would seem that you have a calling."

Bannière blushed; every word that Père Mordon uttered brought a drop of perspiration to his forehead.

"Come, answer me," continued the superior, following the progress of Bannière's emotion upon his features, "is this inclination of yours for the stage a decided calling, or simply a whim?"

"My father!"

"Is it a mere whim, as I said, a caprice, a passing fancy? Is it nothing more than the fictitious aptitude of sluggards for anything except the task which they have to do? Take care, my son; for if it is that, you are nothing more nor less than a shirker, intent upon evading your duty; and shirking is by God's law to be punished."

"I am not a shirker, my father; but —"

"But what?" demanded the Jesuit, without moving a muscle of his face, or allowing a line to appear on his expansive brow.

"But," Bannière went on, "the novitiate causes me some anxiety."

"Disgust you mean, my son."

"Pardon me, my father, I did not say that."

"So much the worse for you if you did not say it," retorted Mordon, inflexibly; "for if you did not say it, I must conclude that a short time ago, when you were deceiving the watchful eyes of your superiors and the Majesty of God in our holy chapel by the ill-timed, illicit, and furtive perusal of a profane book, — I must

conclude, I say, that you were simply yielding to the temptations of the Evil One, who lies in wait in the shadow for dull, thick-witted souls, and seeks to prey upon them, *quærens quem devoret;* and in this case, as you have yielded to a vulgar temptation, easily overcome, as you must have yielded without urging, surrendered without a blow, I shall be compelled most regretfully, my son, to inflict upon you one of the most severe punishments which we have it in our power to inflict, and which will be so much the more severe as this unfortunately is not your first offence."

Bannière recoiled in terror; but his courage came back almost immediately. He realized that he was on the point of engaging in a polemical discussion, in the issue of which his whole future was involved, and that he must carry it through to the end, at the risk of final discomfiture.

"Very well, my father, so be it," said he; "I much prefer to be punished three times, six times, ten times even, confessing that I have sinned voluntarily, I might better say, instinctively, than to allow you to suspect that before I arrived at my present position I had not exhausted my strength in the struggle. Yes, my father, I have struggled; but, like Jacob, I have been again and again overthrown by the angel. I feel an irresistible impulse to read these tragedies, and find an eager pleasure in it which consumes me. Pardon me, if my outspokenness offends you; but you see I am no longer my own master since I entered upon this experience, as I have sufficiently proved by saying what I have said."

"*Vocatio vocatur,*" said the Jesuit, coldly, with undisturbed self-possession. "I admit the accuracy of that text. Now we will take that admitted text for the subject of our conversation. We will say then, my son, that you

have a calling for this art of public exhibition which is called the 'drama'?"

"Yes, my father, and I believe in that calling."

"Very good. But simultaneously with the revelation of your aptitude in that direction, you are studying theology at the Jesuit novitiate?"

"My father —"

"Oh! that may also be admitted, I think."

Bannière fairly shuddered at the cold tone in which the reverend father laid down these ominous premises; he divined that by bringing to bear some unforeseen argument, of which he could anticipate the force, Mordon would proceed to floor his interlocutor, like those clever wrestlers who allow themselves to be seized in some part of the body, to entice their opponents, and eventually vanquish them more easily.

Bannière, then, breathed rather than uttered these four words, —

"Yes, it is admitted."

"Very good!" said the Jesuit. "We will say, then, that while connected with the Society of Jesus you have been fascinated by the actor's profession?"

"My father, I am only a novice," Bannière hastened to say.

"A novice preparing to become a Jesuit is precisely the same thing as a Jesuit for our purpose; for we are reasoning by anticipation, and substituting the future for the present."

Bannière sighed, and bent his head.

"I say, then," resumed the superior, "that you are destined by your relatives to enter the order, but that you are doubtless well informed in advance what are the advantages and disadvantages attendant upon the title of Jesuit. However, my son, as you may not be sufficiently

informed, I will briefly enumerate both advantages and disadvantages. Are you listening, my son?"

"Yes, my father, I am listening," replied Bannière, leaning upon the table to keep himself from falling.

"The disadvantages," continued the superior, "are celibacy, canonical poverty, and disciplinary humility. You understand me, do you not?"

"Perfectly, my father."

"The advantages are the association itself, the support of almost all human intellects, put in motion by a latent interest, inseparable from the existence and real welfare of each associate, our organization being of such a nature that the least member can receive no benefit, moral or physical, in which the whole society does not share. Do you still follow me, my son?"

"Perfectly, my father."

"Hence it follows that the happiness of each one is in proportion to the happiness which we procure for all the others, and *vice versa*. In the word 'happiness,' I include two words, 'well-being' and 'glory,' words which are the mainsprings of all organizations; 'well-being' of those founded upon material considerations, 'glory' of those whose aims are spiritual or idealistic. I add, then, that every Jesuit is caressed and honored by the Society in proportion to the well-being and glory which are conferred upon the Society itself through his instrumentality, and that the Society is itself prosperous and glorious in proportion as its subjects are honored and happy. Every Jesuit, then, must study to be useful in order to be appreciated; when he is once appreciated, he has his reward."

"I still follow you, reverend father," said the young man, as the superior paused, as if awaiting comment.

"Now," Père Mordon continued, "mad indeed would be the guiding spirits of a society who should overlook

the purpose for which it was founded, and should neglect to spread out over all the branches of that fruitful tree which brings forth happiness and glory, the diversely skilful hands of all those who are banded together in the holy name of Jesus. It is enough to enlighten the superiors, who are always selected, you know, my son, for their brilliant abilities; it is sufficient to call their attention to the fact that all men are born with different aptitudes, but that all, from the lowest to the highest, have an aptitude for something or other; for nature has ordained that everything in this world, animate or inanimate, is of use for some purpose. So much the worse for those who do not use or are not used. In this way sometimes die of inanition, of cold and isolation, those germs capable of fertilizing or of being fertilized, which the wind carries from the plants or trees where their work is to be done, and deposits upon unfruitful ground. But among us, my son, among us who are able to detect each one's aptitude and to turn them all to good use, among us there is no dying of inanition or cold or solitude. Every seed is good in our eyes, for we develop the usefulness of each germ, sure as we are of making it bring forth fruit. For my own part, who have the guidance of a number of human souls and minds, I declare to you that I am in no way perplexed by this diversity of aptitudes, which I see developing in my hands, and that I am as well pleased to observe in this garden of intellects which has been put in my charge the blossoming of a scholar as of a poet, of an engineer as of a musician, of a mathematician as of an artist. You may, since you desire it so earnestly, become a clever actor; so be it, I give my consent; become an actor, then, if your temperament urges you to that profession and your calling demands it."

"But in that case, my father," cried Banniere, giddy with joy, "I am no longer a novice; I am no more a student here; I shall leave the Jesuits!"

"Why so?"

"Because the actor's life is incompatible with the life of a recluse, since the one is sacrilegious and accursed, preordained to go straight to hell, while the other is a holy personage, predestined to canonization. The choice must be made, I appreciate that, for one cannot serve two masters at once. You are so good as to leave me free, my father; very well, then! I will admit that the noble bearing, gesticulation and declamation, and constant study to make an impression upon the public, have for me an irresistible fascination and attraction."

"Good, very good, my son!"

"Therefore I will leave the Jesuits to devote myself assiduously to the study of my new profession."

"Leave the Jesuits?" repeated the reverend father, with perfect coolness; "why so, I pray to know?"

Bannière gazed at him in amazement.

"What! my father," said he, "do you wish me to live half at the theatre and half in the convent, one foot upon the stage and one in the church? It is not possible, my father! it would be rank sacrilege, it seems to me."

"But I have said nothing of the sort, my son; to leave the Jesuits would be not only ungrateful, but absurd as well."

"But not to leave them — pardon me, my father, my mind is wandering, no doubt — but in truth I do not fully understand," stammered the poor wretch, writhing on the gridiron which was being gradually heated by the dialectics of the superior.

nothing can be easier than to understand, my

son; for nothing is more clear, and a few words will suffice to prove to you that the good sense of the matter is all with me. Give me a definition of the word 'actor,' I beg."

"My father," began Bannière, embarrassed beyond description, "the actor — the actor — "

"Go on, my son, go on."

"He is a man who speaks in public."

"Good. 'Who speaks in public,' remember that."

"*Mon Dieu! mon Dieu!* what sort of a trap is he setting for me?" muttered Bannière.

"Go on with your definition of an actor, my son," persisted Mordon.

"Well then, the actor, my father, is a man who utters for the behoof of those who have come together to hear him, the most beautiful commonplaces which morality can furnish, upon virtue and vice, crime and its punishment, weakness and passion."

"*Very* good," said Mordon, who had followed and repeated each word of the definition with eyes cast down, approving nods of the head, and a pantomime expressive of entire acquiescence.

"Lastly," added Bannière, "the actor is a man who in a costume calculated to set off his personal charms arouses in the public breast emotions, whose mission is to please, to instruct, and to improve."

"And that is all, is it not?" asked Mordon.

"I think of nothing else," was Bannière's timid response; for he was vastly more ill at ease under this ominous approbation than he would have been if his words had been excepted to.

"Very well, then," Mordon rejoined, "I was right, my son, in insisting that you could do all that you have described perfectly well without severing your connection

with the Society of Jesus. I will go further, — with the aptitude and the evident calling which you have demonstrated, to accomplish all the results which you have yourself enumerated, it would be impossible for you to withdraw without depriving the Society of a considerable accession of glory and well-being. For that reason, my son, you will not go forth from its bosom."

"But, my father," Bannière said, alarmed at this ominous indulgence, and quite at the end of his patience, if not of his perseverance and his calling, "no one ever saw a Jesuit an actor!"

"No one ever saw a Jesuit an actor, very true," was Mordon's phlegmatic retort; "but Jesuits have been known to become preachers. Why should you not be a preacher, and a fine preacher too?"

"I a preacher!" exclaimed the thunderstruck Bannière, bearing hard upon each syllable.

"Why, to be sure; I should say that you yourself, only a moment since, were drawing the portrait of a preacher with a master hand."

"I?"

"Yes, you, to be sure."

"Of an actor, you mean!"

"Or of a preacher. Let me repeat your definition word for word.

"First. 'A man who speaks in public.' Preachers speak in public, unless I am much mistaken.

"Second. 'A man who utters for the behoof of those who have come together to hear him the most beautiful commonplaces which morality can furnish, upon virtue and vice, crime and its punishment, weakness and passion.'

"I think, my dear son, that preachers do just that.

"Third. 'The man who in a costume calculated to set

off his personal charms arouses in the public breast emotions, whose mission is to please, to instruct, and to improve.'

"There is your threefold definition; you see how well I remember it, my son, for I have not changed a word. Now, if ever a definition fitted a person exactly, this one of yours, my son, fits the preacher. And indeed, clad in his priestly costume, which is the noblest and most imposing, and the best calculated to set off the personal attractions of a handsome man (modest and decent attractions, my son, for we never think of any others, do we?), his hair well oiled, his hand half hidden within his flowing lace-sleeve, the preacher, when he has a beautiful face, as Monsieur de Fénelon had, can produce a most marvellous impression upon his audience. I do not say — note well, my dear son — that I approve of Monsieur de Fénelon's theological opinions. No, quite the contrary; but I am speaking of his appearance and manner only. Thus I have applied every part of your definition, and I await your response."

"Pardon, reverend father," said Bannière, "but I expected, in speaking to you with so much freedom, to persuade you of my calling to be an actor."

"Or a preacher, my son. I understood."

"But whatever you may say, my father, it is not the same thing."

"Absolutely the same, my son, at least according to your definition; and when the same definition applies to the two, if either is entitled to priority, it certainly is the preacher."

"But, my father," cried Bannière, "let me finish my definition, please!"

"Very willingly, my son; finish it, finish it."

"I will add, then," said Bannière, with the naïve

triumph of a young lamb who has escaped for the moment from the wolf's jaws, "that the actor is a man who plays historical pieces, — works which represent deeds of high emprise, and recall events which have changed the whole face of the world."

"I stop you there," said Père Mordon, with imperturbable calmness. "You have put the finishing touch, with a very clever stroke of the pencil, to your portrait of the preacher, and I congratulate you most sincerely upon it."

"What!" cried Bannière, at his wits' end.

"Do me the favor, I beg, to name a play, comedy, or tragedy, or drama of any variety, which can for a moment abide comparison, for style, interest of its plot, scope of its action, detail of its situations, or its final catastrophe, with the Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ. Imagine yourself standing in the pulpit, the sole actor, mark you, without leader or associates, and that you have it in charge to interpret that sublime drama, in which Heaven for the redemption of the earth lends to it the Son of its God: imagine that you are portraying the tergiversations of Pontius Pilate, the artifices of Caiaphas, the hatred of the Pharisees, the apostasy of Peter; tell me, do you know in the whole length and breadth of the drama, in the plays of Corneille or Racine, of Shakspeare or Jonson, or of the old Greek masters, a more marvellously beautiful scene, a more sublime soliloquy, than the meditation of Jesus on the Mount of Olives, or a more superb and picturesque *mise-en-scène* than the arrest of Our Lord in that same garden?

"Where can be found a grander spectacle than the judgment of Pilate, or one with greater lyric suggestions and of higher moral value than the choice between Jesus

and Barabbas? Add to this the development of each separate mode of torture, with its religious and moral significance. Last of all, the progress to the place of execution, surrounded by the saintly women, — its haltings and its faintings. And the punishment itself, my son, and that marvellous narrative, compared with which, you will agree, the narrative of Theramenes or of Ulysses is hardly more than commonplace, or even the description of the battle of Salamis, in the pages of ancient Æschylus, the master of masters! There, my dearest son, there is a tragedy where human vice and passion are involved. There is a historical work, there an event which has changed the face of the world; a drama in which you may play, if you choose, the principal part, the only part, with the applause of the whole Society, and of the world, — before kings and queens, if you so desire, and with a bishopric or an archbishopric in prospect, — yes, a cardinal's baretta, to say nothing of the pontifical tiara itself, a dubious but still possible chance, upon which no actor has ever counted, so far as I am informed."

After this discourse, in the course of which the reverend father had warmed up a little as orators do for their peroration, Mordon raised his eyelids, opened his eyes to their full size, and fairly enveloped the novice in the brilliant gleams which shot from them.

But Bannière, irritated by all this resistance, and wounded by the subtle twists and turnings in which the crafty and loquacious Mordon had indulged, cried out, —

"My father, it is neither church nor pulpit, nor sermonizing, nor missionary ardor, with which my mind is occupied. I care nothing for the applause of a religious gathering; my calling, wretched, fated, accursed that I

am, draws me towards profane things. I aspire to be an actor upon the boards of a theatre, where actors and actresses perform,—actors like Monsieur Baron, actresses like Mademoiselle de Champmeslé! That is what I desire, my father, that is what I ask, that is what I must have!"

"Enough, enough, my son," rejoined the Jesuit, passing his hand across his broad forehead, upon which for a moment had appeared great folds like the waves of the Mediterranean in a storm; "I believe, upon my word, that you are in error as to your pretended calling, and I tremble lest your present symptoms denote those diabolical temptations, by means of which the enemy of the human race seduces feeble souls. Happily your welfare is precious to me, my son; and to assist you in acquiring strength of purpose, I beg you to repair upon the instant to the Chamber of Meditation, where you will pass such time as may be necessary to restore those healthy mental conditions which form the basis of every education intended to promote God's glory."

As he ceased speaking, Père Mordon struck a bell, and repeated before the servant the order which he had given Bannière; and the young man, crushed to earth, flushed with shame, gasping in bitterness of spirit, with head cast down and trembling knees, followed the valet who was to conduct him to the Chamber of Meditation.

VI.

THE CHAMBER OF MEDITATION.

THE convents had their *in pace*, their prisons, and their dungeons. The Jesuits, who were too civilized to concern themselves with man's physical side alone, invented the CHAMBER OF MEDITATION.

On the first floor at the rear of the building, flanked by a corridor barred and bolted as to its windows and its doors, opened, or rather closed, a room of vast size, whose arched roof was sufficiently high to prevent the meditations of the prisoners interfering with those of the spiders who had selected the corners of the black cornices for their place of abode; sufficiently high also — and this was the most important point — to preclude all hope of those same prisoners ever reaching the window, supplied with a single pane of glass, which stared down from the roof like a Cyclopean eye, and gave entrance to an infinitesimal amount of light, much impaired by the dust and smoke on the glass.

As we have said, the light of day descended very sadly and bashfully into the depths of that forbidding cage; but we must say that Apollo, who was god of light and of meditation at the same time, could hardly have experienced the least pleasure in visiting the interior of this retreat, the four walls of which were hung with black material, plentifully sown with death's-heads and cross-bones, of some white stuff laid upon the black, and fastened with a stout thread of black and white. More

than that, scattered here and there among these sinister symbols were inscriptions worked in white upon the hangings; and there again was exhibited that singular caprice of imparting to these compulsory meditations, inflicted by the Jesuits upon rebellious novices, a character quite at variance with the historic gayety of the French as a people.

All the blackest dregs which the ancient poets found in their empty amphoræ, all the most wildly despairing shrieks of the Sages, from the "O bios esti parodos skias," to the "Serius ocyus" of Horace, from the doleful verses of the "Dies Irae" to the much criticised formulas of the "Perindè ac cadaver" of the Society of Jesus, it was all spread out there in white letters upon those gloomy, black, deathly-hued hangings.

These innumerable mottoes of huge size, and in different styles of lettering, attracted the eye, like revelations standing out in relief from that black wall, as if all these stern moralists and spirit-depressing versifiers had come from the depths of the unknown world where they dwelt, to trace with invisible finger, for the benefit of the "meditating" novice, their meditations, revised, corrected, and expanded, according to the circumstances of the case.

Bannière, then, was cast into this dungeon, which was absolutely strange to him, and which he knew only from the reports of those of his comrades who had had a taste of it.

Bannière was a well-behaved novice, that is to say, he was regular in the performance of his duties as a student, liked the Latin verses, and the French ones too, of Père de la Sante, and admired to the point of enthusiasm Monsieur Arouet. So that, as we have seen, he had had two copies of "Mariamne" confiscated, and had not handed over the third to the superior until he knew

all the different parts by heart, from Hérode, King of Palestine, down to Narbas, an officer of the Amorrhean kings, and from Mariamne, Hérode's wife, to Élise, her confidante.

From Bannière's enthusiastic admiration for Monsieur de Voltaire, which rebounded in gushing streams upon the two or three tragedies which the young philosopher had already published, we may infer that he did not know of the terrible failure which had been the fate of the tragedy of "Mariamne" at the time of its representation, on the 5th of January, 1724, three years before the events with which we are concerned. The failure was so complete that the tragedy was thought to be dead for good and all. But Arouet was persistent; he picked up the pieces of the poor queen, and put them together as well as it had been ill done before; he shortened the scene between Varus and Hérode, and substituted a touching narrative of the death of Mariamne for her death by poison on the stage,— a *denouement* which was enlivened, to the author's discomfiture, by the ill-timed pleasantry of a spectator, who began to shout, "La reine boit" (The queen is drinking)! And the play, thanks to these emendations and many others which the author enumerates in his preface, to which we refer our readers for fuller information,— thanks to these emendations, we say again, the play had in 1725 a success as pronounced as its failure in 1724 had been.

This does not prove that the public were strictly logical, but it does prove that the play succeeded at last after it had failed at first. Bannière had learned not only the play as it was written, but the variations inserted by the author at the end, doubtless so that not a line of that beautiful poetry, which still at this hour causes three fourths of the Academicians to faint with delight, need be lost to posterity.

Up to that time Bannière knew nothing of the rigorous discipline of the Jesuits beyond the confiscation of Monsieur Arouet's books.

His calling — a gentle, but bright light — had hitherto served to people the gloom of the novitiate with affable shades and graceful phantoms of all sorts. He had made friends among his fellows, and had compelled the respect of his masters by the originality of his character. In a word, he had enjoyed that indefinable consideration which always falls to the lot of independent and self-assertive minds in every branch of industry.

That is why, in the course of his captivity with the other black birds in the cage of the novitiate, he, more than the others, had seen friendly hands approach the bars, and had longed for air and freedom more than the others; and being, like all gentle natures, of a trusting disposition, he seemed to have fallen from such a height into the dungeon of meditation, that the only resource which remained to him was to curse the perfidious wretches who had brought about his heavy fall.

Bannière's first emotion, then, was surprise; the second, indignation.

But he was a youth of good sense; he quickly reflected that the Jesuits could not compound with actors, and that if Jesuits and actors were to make common cause, it would be unbecoming and unfair for the ones to be confessors of kings, governors and princes, and to be State Inquisitors, notwithstanding their ugly and melancholy garb, while the others not only were excluded from all places of honor, but were excommunicated, dishonored, and cast out in all their embroidered coats, velvet mantles, and feathers; that God, who is supreme wisdom and eternal justice, had given each his compensation; that the Jesuit, when once he had become accustomed to his cage,

loved it, because he gilded the bars, while the actor, on the other hand, could not learn to become fond of cages, not having succeeded in gilding them.

This logic led Bannière to such an immoderate longing for freedom that he resolved to seek to procure it by every conceivable means.

After he had read and criticised with bitter irony all the texts which the walls recited to him, he vented his spleen against his superiors who were persecuting him, and esteeming the occasion a favorable one for indulging without restraint in declamation, he began to play "Hérode et Mariamne," all by himself.

The arches, which were accustomed to hear naught but the complaints and maledictions of the meditators, wondered to find themselves re-echoing the hemistichs of a tragedy. Bannière, draped in his cassock, over which he had thrown the coverlid of his bed by way of mantle, acted, shouted, and groaned the different rôles, imitated the note of the trumpet announcing the heralds, and the various sounds emitted by the mob, — in short, carried Voltaire's masterpiece through to the last line of the variations and notes.

That lasted quite four hours.

During those four hours Bannière was agreeably diverted in his triple rôle of spectator, actor, and incarcerated Jesuit.

But all things have an end here below; whether the Chamber of Meditation was producing its due effect, whether fatigue was getting the upper hand of poetry in the wretched prisoner's mind, or whether because the gentle Mariamne had no longer to struggle with her ferocious tyrant, certain it is that Bannière finally fell into a state of torpor.

Nor was that all. We have said that the Jesuits

sometimes disciplined recalcitrant novices with hunger; that which subdues tigers, lions, and elephants might well have a like effect upon Bannière. A full brain makes an empty stomach, but an empty stomach does but little towards filling the brain; at best it fills it with naught but vapors.

In short, after two hours of resistance, during which Bannière's moral force grew constantly weaker,— having no longer the strength to declaim even the smallest rôle in his favorite tragedy, nor to read with benefit the ghostly inscriptions, the prisoner lay down upon his bed, covered himself with the blanket, and began to reflect upon his present as compared with his past situation.

He did not go farther than that, the future being enveloped in such utter darkness that he did not seek even to guess at what it held.

The night, a wise counsellor of honest minds, called by the Greeks "the mother of opportunity," and used by the Jesuits as a potent auxiliary in subduing their rebellious subjects,— night came slowly down from heaven, and covered the solitary window, the dungeon's eye, with the film of blindness.

Gradually the white letters of the inscriptions along the walls faded from sight; gradually they returned to the oblivion whence they had been exhumed those moral apothegms which told of the doom of mankind, to disappear like the dust, to rot, and to bend like the reed beneath the hand of necessity.

Soon Bannière could distinguish nothing; and he lay there upon his poor couch, growing colder and more depressed with every moment. Two hours more passed away, during which he came definitely to the conclusion that the inscription affixed to the door of the apartment in which he was confined was not a mere unmeaning

collection of letters, but that the place was very justly called the "Chamber of Meditation."

"Que faire dans un gîte à moins que l'on n'y songe ?"[1]

said La Fontaine.

So Bannière dreamed; and having dreamed, he went to sleep.

Night, as old Homer says, had traversed half the sky in its silver-wheeled chariot of ebony, when a peculiar, sharp, persistent noise awoke the novice from the drowsiness which hunger and meditation had produced in his brain.

This noise, a very familiar scratching, came from the hangings at his left.

Bannière opened one eye after the other, and having turned upon his bed so as to face the noise, he listened.

The strident echo continued to sing its monotonous song. There was no room for mistake; the novice recognized the sound made by the teeth of a rat. It came from a spot about twelve feet from the floor, and between the hangings and the wall.

Bannière sighed a doleful sigh.

What caused him to sigh? The thought of the contrast, alas! for in his humbled frame of mind he considered that rat very much to be envied.

Happy indeed was the little creature, to be making a hearty midnight supper upon the inscriptions of the moralists and stoic philosophers who preached abstinence and disinterestedness!

Happy indeed was he, free to glide about between the wall and the hangings, to feast upon the old cloth and old leather.

But no, it was not upon cloth, or leather either, that

[1] "What is there to do in bed unless one dreams ?"

the beast was feeding. The echo was sonorous, and indicated that the rat was at work on wood.

That was a fact of serious importance, mark well. Not for you, dear reader, nor for you, Madame, wrapped in your comfortable *robe de chambre*, with your feet on the andirons, and the soothing consciousness that you have only to say the word, to go for a turn in the Bois, or to the Champs Élysées at least; but for Bannière, the unhappy captive, in whose ear the slightest sound assumed a degree of importance in proportion to his weariness of captivity, and his longing to be free.

Thus it made a vast difference to Bannière whether the rat was gnawing wood or leather.

His reasoning was something like this: —

"That's wood! Yes, that rat is certainly gnawing wood. Now, how in the devil can he have hoisted a piece of wood to that height? and if he has accomplished that feat (which would require much long, hard labor, as he has no machine like that which Antony used to transport his galleys from the Mediterranean to the Red Sea), how does he succeed in maintaining his hold upon that surface of stone or plaster, while he tranquilly eats his supper, as he seems to be doing? Has he a hole there, or a piece of cornice or some protuberance to serve as a table?

"Perhaps he has taken a grip on the wall, and made a bridge of himself across to the hangings. He could crunch away then at his leisure, using himself as table and hammock at once.

"But no! that echo is so sonorous, and grates so upon the ear, the sound is so clearly defined, that it cannot be made upon a mere splinter of wood which the rat has detached somewhere. It surely is produced by a constant series of attacks by the little fellow upon a woody

mass, immovable and having, like all solids, length, breadth, and thickness.

"There must be some woodwork up there," said Bannière to himself; and he added reflectively, "Perhaps, indeed, the whole wall is of wood beneath the hangings."

As this thought occurred to him, he rose and walked to the wall and struck it; there was no sound, for it was of solid rock.

"Very good," muttered the novice; "but that does n't prove that there 's no woodwork up there. A window, perhaps!"

And thereupon Bannière built up a whole poem of suppositions.

"What is the use of that window? Why have a window under thick hangings?

"There are little wickets, called Judases, through which every meditating novice is sure of being watched by some spy whose duty it is to report to the father superior.

"There are secret doors — "

There Bannière checked himself.

"If there are secret doors," said he, "there are ways of getting out of the Chamber of Meditation."

He thereupon began to sound the wall again, and convinced himself that the door or window was in its lowest part at the abnormal height of six feet at least; for he tested the whole wall up to that height, which he was able to reach with the tips of his fingers, by standing on the tips of his toes.

"If it is a door, and that door is up in the air," was his judicious reflection, "it can be of no possible use; unless," he added, "he who proposes to use it brings his ladder along.

"It must be, then, that the woodwork is a window-frame and not a door-frame."

The window was not an unlikely supposition; so Bannière decided for the window.

But as the darkness rendered exploration difficult, he postponed further operations till the morning. The result of this postponement was that the rat passed a delicious night, and never ceased his gnawing till day-break.

Not so fortunate as his host, the rodent, Bannière passed a most anxious night, especially tormented by internal pangs, which were outwardly expressed by the grumbling mutterings of hunger, and harmonized admirably with the gnawing of the rat.

VII.

THE PROCESSION OF HÉRODE AND MARIAMNE.

We have said that the rat's banquet came to an end at daybreak; and at daybreak the novice's labor began.

His first care was to make himself absolutely certain that his arm and hand, extended to their utmost length, would not reach the supposititious window. But for all its lack of the conveniences of a well-furnished apartment, the Chamber of Meditation afforded all that was essential for a man who did not fear to run the risk of breaking his neck, to climb to a height of ten or twelve feet.

The materials for his scaffolding consisted of the small cot which served him as a bed, topped by the stool which took the place of a chair. These two objects, one upon the other, reached to a height of four feet, and by adding a second stool an elevation of five feet and a half was obtained; Bannière's five feet and four inches perched upon this structure made nearly eleven feet.

If it should be necessary to go higher, he could climb up on the hangings, using the white inscriptions for footholds. He might tear the hangings, but no matter; by the very act of tearing them he would at least find out what mysteries were hidden beneath them.

The event justified Bannière's procedure. He climbed up on the cot, thence to the first stool, and so on to the second; having reached that point, he tore the hangings to make a place for his foot, which added two or three

inches more to his stature; he then struck his fist against the wall, and was rewarded by hearing a sound similar to that made by a wooden shutter when an inquisitive hand is trying to open it.

Bannière sought a support for his other foot, tore the hangings in another place, and, held up on one side by the *vanitas vanitatum* and on the other by the *connais-toi toi-même*, and his left hand grasping a death's-head, with the right he thrust aside the thick material, and discovered the very thing which his perspicacity, so highly spoken of by Père Mordon, had led him to anticipate,—that is to say, an old condemned window, closed with a shutter reinforced by an iron bar. In the days when it had done duty for an apartment, which probably had not then attained the dignity of a Chamber of Meditation, the size of the window was well suited to the task of lighting it properly; whereas, in default of it, the room received all of its light through that dubious opening, an eye without an eyeball, which pierced the roof, and gazed dismally at the prisoner.

"A window!" cried Bannière, joyfully.

But he quickly checked himself.

"Good! but upon what does it open?"

"Oh, head of Medusa! if I burst open this shutter, cut away the curtain, and open a prospect, what will that prospect embrace? Shall I not find on the other side of the window either the sneering face of some spy of the superior, or it may be the mocking countenance of the superior himself? Why may not the Jesuit have a room of his own adjoining this? Why may he not have anticipated the effect of the rat's gnawing, and have a biting phrase all ready for the first appearance of my nose through his window?"

It was horrible to think of.

"But no! a rat will always have more instinct than a superior, even a superior of the Jesuits, has of cleverness. A rat would not gnaw away all night unless he were sure that he could do it with impunity. If he selected that place, it was because he knew that he had no surprise or ambuscade to fear."

Suddenly a cold perspiration sent a chill down Bannière's back.

"Suppose that Père Mordon, who has seized two copies of 'Hérode et Mariamne,' and detected me studying a third, who has boxed me up here, and kept me without food for eighteen hours already, in order to restore his disciple's religious and moral perception,—suppose that Père Mordon, that shrewd and all-embracing genius, has lowered himself so far as to invent some machine which imitates the gnawing of a rat! Such things are known in natural history, and why should they not be possible in mechanics? Serpents whistle like birds, and hyenas imitate children's crying, to attract the attention of human beings; foxes have been seen hunting the hare as dogs do, while one of their number, himself a fox, lay in wait for him to pass. Now, a Jesuit is no more of a bungler than a serpent, no more of a fool than a hyena, and no more of a simpleton than a fox; he would surely be clever enough to draw a novice into the snare of a serious mistake, at need. What would be necessary to accomplish it? A paltry two hours' gnawing on a piece of wood."

Bannière's imaginings terrified him; but his first audacity soon returned.

"I weaken!" he exclaimed; "I, who am imprisoned and starving, recoil at the thought of one more annoyance! No, by my faith! I will open that window; it may be a window, or it may not, but in any event it is a

way out of some sort, and if I find a Jesuit on the other side, and he cries, 'What do you want?' I will reply, 'Bread.'"

As if to encourage himself before the pangs of hunger became unbearable, Banniere climbed up again, drew the iron bar, and opened the shutter.

Ineffable joy! No Jesuit was on the watch behind the window; only the glorious sun, binding up his golden tresses in the azure sky, invaded the sombre breeding-place of meditation.

Through the opening he had made, Bannière breathed the delicious air of the morning, and the moist odor of the Rhone, rising in soft vapor from the river-bed to the house-tops.

He inhaled several deep breaths, and then looked about him.

The window opened on a street which cut another straight street obliquely, their junction forming a square.

Thanks to the steepness of the straight street, Bannière could see the people passing; they were scarce as yet, but he could see them.

He took his fill of that sight so dear to the eyes of a prisoner, inhaled a large stock of the air of liberty, and estimated the height of the window. It was nearly thirty feet from the street, which was paved with that sort of broken stone which is peculiar to the cities of the South.

Having taken in all these details at a glance, Bannière feared he might be discovered before he had come to any determination; so he stepped back, closed the shutter, readjusted the inscriptions, and smoothed out the hangings; after which he dragged the cot back to its place, and returned to his stool like a dog to his kennel.

Towards seven o'clock Bannière heard sounds in the corridor, and saw his door open. It was the servant bringing him a morsel of food, which seemed even less than it was, so furious was his appetite. He did not play at daintiness, however, for he thought that he needed strength, and devoured the meagre pittance to the last crumb.

Then, sure of being undisturbed until the morrow, the servant having warned him to divide his supply of food into three portions, as he should not return that day, the prisoner mounted again to his observatory.

It was the time of day when provisions are laid in, when housekeepers go to the fish-market, when the snappers of the bread and cake sellers, and the rattles of the collectors are heard in the streets.

With his chin resting on the window-sill, Bannière looked at all these agreeable sights with as much wonder as if he had never seen them before.

Suddenly he heard a great noise of drums and fifes, cymbals and Chinese bells, and at the end of the straight street he saw defile into the square a long procession of people in odd costumes, with banners and enormous placards. One of the latter bore, in black letters upon a red ground, the words: —

"Procession d'Hérode et Mariamne, Tragédie de Monsieur Arouet."

This first announcement was followed by a second poster bearing these seductive words: —

"The dramatic company of the city will to-day present the beautiful moral tragedy of Hérode et Mariamne, by Monsieur Arouet de Voltaire, as admirable for its fascinating style as for the purity of its sentiments."

Then came the actors in two lines, in their stage dress, followed by the supernumeraries, and the guards of Hérode, with their cuirasses and armor. There were Romans, Asiatics, and Jews in considerable numbers.

The long tails of the horses, the crescent-shaped standards (which indicated that the manager cared more for the magnificence of the *mise-en-scène* than for historical accuracy), and the glistening spangles made all the little ragamuffins in town shriek with delight.

At the head of the actors Champmeslé dragged himself along, sad unto death. The kind words of Père de la Sante had lost their effect, doubtless, for he was in every respect like a martyr going to the stake before his eye has caught sight of the crown which awaits him.

But, notwithstanding his deep despondency, he was so bravely attired in a red chlamys, with a helmet-turban, wide-topped boots with spurs, and a white cloak with gold stars, that the crowd devoured him with their gaze, the women especially; the result being that the glances of the men were laden with that assumed contempt which is the cloak of envy.

Again, notwithstanding his despondency, of which Bannière alone knew the cause, there was something so noble in his royal bearing, that the novice, who considered it the very acme of honor to lead such a procession and to be clad in such garb, almost forgot himself so far as to clap his hands when he passed; but just at that moment he espied, beneath her long white veil, Mariamne, surrounded not alone by King Hérode's guards, but by a crowd of officers from the garrisons of Nîmes and Orange, who had come to Avignon to attend the holiday-making which was caused by the presence of so large and important a troupe in the city. These officers, like the inquisitive heathens they were, tried from time to time

to raise the veil in which the Queen of Palestine was modestly enveloped, like a sun in its recess of clouds. Suddenly the cloud opened to allow the sun to smile upon a handsome captain who had, under his uniform of the royal gendarmerie, all the appearance of a great lord; and Bannière, dazzled by the rays shed by the beautiful planet, which showed its face for a moment (for the behoof of another than himself, it is true, but which he had chanced to see), forgot the necessity of holding on, and losing his balance, which his hands alone had enabled him to maintain, he pitched headlong down into the Chamber of Meditation, carrying with him a great piece of the hangings which he had seized as he fell, and leaving the wall quite bare.

Whatever the moving cause of his resolution may have been, Bannière had sworn not to remain captive in a city where such miracles were taking place. So he went gayly back to the assault, and hung his chin upon the window-sill once more, just as the last of Hérode's guards, whose enormous halberd was visible some seconds after the man had disappeared, passed out of sight in the street to the left.

"Good!" thought Bannière; "this evening I will tear off a piece of the hangings, tie it firmly to the window-frame, let myself down along the wall, and go, happy and free, to see this piece played at the theatre by real actors and actresses.

"The fathers will make a great outcry; let them do it, I don't care. They will have me followed, — all right; they will catch me at it, — that is perfectly certain; but *ma foi!* I shall have seen the play; and if they punish me for it, why, upon my soul, I shall suffer for something."

VIII.

THE ACTORS' LOBBY.

BANNIÈRE did as he had resolved, step by step. When the light began to fail, he tore down great pieces of the hangings, and made a cord twenty feet long, with knots placed at intervals; to that cord he intrusted himself, dropped the six or eight feet which remained between him and the ground when he reached the end of the cord, took to the pavement, and ran at headlong speed, like an intoxicated or insane man, in the direction of the theatre, which was situated opposite the Ousle gate, and was easily located by the shouts of the door-keepers and the notes of the fife.

It was just the hour when all the fair ladies of Avignon were arriving at the theatre, and the long lines of carriages, sedan-chairs, and Bath-chairs began to crowd the square.

Bannière, cast into the midst of this concourse of people, was decidedly shamefaced, and oppressed by his novice's garb. It is very true that custom then permitted ecclesiastics, and Jesuits in particular, to attend dramatic performances. But Bannière was not the proprietor of a single sou. He might, indeed, have requested some pleasant-featured person, — and they are always very numerous at the door of a theatre, — to take him into his box with him; but his infernal dress would attract all eyes, and if among those eyes there happened to be two

in the service of Père Mordon, he was lost. He might have taken off his wretched cassock; but if he had done so, it would have left him in his shirt-sleeves, and how could he gain admittance in his shirt-sleeves, except to the most crowded galleries?

He was in very great perplexity; the minutes were rapidly passing by. Hidden behind a pillar, he saw, with a painful swelling of the heart, the prettiest little feet under the whitest of skirts trip lightly by him, while from the carriages and chairs alighted such plump legs and slender ankles that all the inscriptions in the Chamber of Meditation would have failed at that moment to supply the poor Jesuit with sufficient philosophy.

Suddenly Bannière perceived two of the Jesuit fathers in their black carriage, awaiting their turn in the line of carriages with saintly patience. Having reached the door, their conveyance halted; to enter, they must pass within four paces of Bannière.

Tormented by the triple demon of curiosity, longing, and fear, Bannière took the moment when the carriage stopped to effect a skilful retreat; he began by placing a pillar between himself and the fathers, and keeping in its shadow as he moved away, he finally darted into the actors' lobby.

But he had no sooner taken refuge in that gloomy and dusty corridor which was feebly lighted by a single evil-smelling candle-end, than he felt himself pushed roughly back by two strong hands which came very near throwing him off his balance, so preoccupied was he. But he was young, active, and strong; if he fell, he ran the risk of showing his torn breeches; so he clung fast to the impertinent individual, who had a way of making room for himself, so strangely out of harmony with the polite manners of that period.

It was a man; and as he turned about, Bannière found himself face to face with him.

"Let me pass, death of all the devils!" he cried, trying to force Bannière against the wall.

"What! you, Monsieur de Champmeslé!" exclaimed Bannière.

"And you, my little Jesuit!" cried Champmeslé.

By the sickly light of the candle-end they had recognized each other.

"Ah, Monsieur de Champmeslé!" said one.

"Ah, my dear Bannière!" said the other.

"It is really you?"

"Alas! yes, it is I."

"Pray, whither are you rushing off like that? Are you in need of something for your costume?"

"Ah, yes, my costume! I don't care for my costume."

"Yet it was very handsome," said Bannière, enviously.

"Yes," said Champmeslé, bitterly; "it is so beautiful that I shall wear it in hell."

"In hell! what do you mean?"

"Nothing; let me pass."

"But one would say that you were running away, my dear sir."

"Indeed I think I am running away."

"But the performance?"

"Ah! the performance; that is just the reason I am running away."

"Oh, yes, I understand."

"Let me pass then, I tell you."

"Always the same fancies?"

"More than ever. Do you know what has happened to me?"

"You terrify me."

"Monsieur," said Champmeslé, with haggard eyes, "I dined at noon, did I not?"

"I have no doubt of it."

"After dinner I took my nap."

"Very sensibly."

"Very well! my brother, during my nap —"

Here he looked uneasily about on all sides.

"During your nap?" Bannière repeated.

"I had a vision, myself."

"Oh!"

"Such a vision as my father and grandfather each had."

"What sort of a vision, *mon Dieu?*"

"Only mine was even more terrifying than theirs."

"How so?"

"I saw myself, my dear brother —"

"You saw yourself?"

"Yes, in hell, upon a red-hot gridiron, in my Hérode costume, and turned by a devil who was as like Monsieur de Voltaire as two drops of water. Oh, it was frightful! Let me pass, let me pass!"

"But, my dear Monsieur de Champmeslé, you don't mean it."

"On the contrary, I do mean just that; let me pass!"

"But you will make the whole play a failure!"

"I prefer to have it a failure, rather than to be turned on a gridiron, in the dress of King Hérode, for all eternity, by a devil who looks like Monsieur de Voltaire."

"But you will ruin your fellow-actors!"

"On the contrary, I shall save them and myself, and with myself all the poor wretches who would be damned for coming to see us. Adieu!"

This time Champmeslé joined his wish and his motion so successfully that he twisted Bannière around three times, and meanwhile had passed him and was off.

"Monsieur de Champmeslé! Monsieur de Champmeslé!" cried Bannière, following him a few steps.

But in vain did Bannière cry after him and follow him, for the actor had heard steps approaching on the stairway which led into the theatre, and at the sound he had darted away like a stag which scents the pack.

Bannière was left alone, bewildered to stupefaction.

But the voices and steps, which Champmeslé had heard as if by intuition, began to be very audible on the rough stairs.

The steps were very hurried, and the voices were crying, "Champmeslé! Champmeslé!"

There were both male and female voices.

Suddenly the door opening from the stairway into the lobby flew open, and there burst upon Bannière's sight an avalanche of frightened actors and actresses in tragic costumes, shouting with all their strength in woe-begone tones and with gestures of despair,—

"Champmeslé! Champmeslé!"

The whole rout surrounded Bannière, shrieking: "Champmeslé! Champmeslé! Have you seen Champmeslé?"

"Yes, Messieurs," said Bannière, "to be sure. I have seen him."

"What have you done with him then?"

"I? Nothing."

"Well, then, where is he?"

"He has gone."

"Gone!" cried the women.

"You let him go?" shouted the men.

"Alas, yes, Messieurs; alas, yes, Mesdames. He has fled."

Bannière had no sooner uttered that word than he was pounced upon, seized, pulled hither and thither in ten

different directions by ten pairs of hands, — some soft and charming, others rough and almost threatening.

"He has fled, he has fled!" cried actors and actresses in unison. "The Jesuit saw him go. Monsieur le Jesuite, is it really true, is it absolutely certain, that Champmeslé has fled?"

Bannière could not answer them all. They who questioned him appreciated that. So the orator of the troupe, he whose business it was to make a speech to the public on great occasions, raised his voice and requested silence, and silence ensued.

"And so, my brother," he asked, "you saw Champmeslé go away?"

"As plainly as I see you, Monsieur."

"Did he speak with you?"

"He did me that honor."

"To tell you — "

"That he had had a vision."

"A vision — a vision — is he mad? what vision?"

"He saw himself damned, and being cooked upon a gridiron, which was being turned by Monsieur de Voltaire dressed as a devil."

"Ah, yes, he spoke of it to me also."

"And to me."

"And to me."

"But where has he gone, anyway?" the orator asked.

"Alas, Monsieur, I have no idea."

"When will he return?" asked the duenna.

"Alas, Madame, he left me in ignorance upon that point."

"But this is terrible!"

"It is unworthy of him!"

"It is downright treachery!"

"He will be late for his *entrée!*"

"He will disgust the audience!"

"Ah, Messieurs and Mesdames!" cried Bannière in a doleful voice, well calculated to prepare his hearers for most terrible revelations.

"Well, what is it?"

"If I dared to tell you the whole truth —"

"Tell it, tell it!"

"I should announce to you that you will not see Monsieur de Champmeslé again."

"Not see him again?"

"Not this evening, at all events."

At these words the lobby was filled with exclamations of despair which penetrated into the stairway, and thence spread through the upper corridors.

"But why — why is it?" the question arose on all sides.

"Why, Messieurs, I have told you, and, Mesdames, I tell you once more, — because Monsieur de Champmeslé is possessed of a timorous conscience, and fears that he shall be damned if he plays this evening."

"Monsieur," said the orator of the troupe, "we are in a bad place to talk about our affairs; we can be overheard. The rumor of Champmeslé's flight may get about before we have found means to lessen its effect. Do us the honor, Monsieur, to ascend to the green-room."

"To the green-room!" cried Bannière, "the actors' and actresses' green-room!"

"Yes; there you can give us all the details which you cannot give here, and it may be, Monsieur, some good advice."

"Yes, yes, come," said the women, hanging on Bannière's arms; while the balance of the troupe divided into two parties, one of which went ahead, pulling him along, and the other pushed him behind.

IX.

THE GREEN-ROOM.

BANNIÈRE, to his credit be it said, resisted like a hero; but unfortunately he was the weaker party, and they dragged, or rather carried, him to the green-room to testify to the truth of the fatal news.

There before the whole troupe, all ready to begin the play, Bannière was compelled not only to narrate a second time all that had taken place in the actors' lobby ten minutes before, but, as a preface to the woful catastrophe which had brought despair upon the company, he found himself describing the visit of Champmeslé to the chapel of the novitiate the day before, and the conversation that ensued.

This narrative, delivered with a degree of emotion easily imagined, for the novice was in a fever of excitement with his flight, and intoxicated by the bright glare of the lamps, and by the touch and breath and subtle perfumes of the actresses, who surrounded him with an atmosphere beside which the blasts of hell so much dreaded by Champmeslé would have seemed like cool breezes from Lapland, — this narrative, we say, produced a most dismal effect upon the assemblage.

"Well, the money will have to be returned, that 's sure," exclaimed the orator, letting his hands fall despondently.

"We are ruined!" said the first old man.

"The theatre will have to close!" cried the duenna.

"And to think that the whole city is in the hall!" added Mariamne's maid, a young soubrette of eighteen, who spoke as if she knew the whole city.

"And Monsieur de Mailly, who has provided a supper for us and sent word that he will come to eat it with us!" said the orator.

"And Olympe, who has no Hérode now!" the first old man added.

"Does she know what has happened?"

"No, she is still in her dressing-room; she is just finishing her toilet. I heard Champmeslé, as he passed not five minutes ago, call 'Good-evening,' to her."

"Well, let us tell her," said several voices among the women, forgetting their selfishness in the face of this public catastrophe.

Immediately there was a grand rush for the door; and Bannière, deserted for the moment, seized the opportunity to take his station modestly in a corner.

Suddenly the crowd at the door separated.

"What is it? what 's the matter? what do you want?" said a young woman who made her appearance on the threshold. She was exquisitely beautiful, and came majestically forward, clad in a regal costume of great magnificence, with skirts ten feet in circumference and a towering head-dress, and followed by two maids of honor, bearing the train of her cloak.

Her eyes were black, and shone the blacker for the powder around them; her cheeks were full and oval-shaped, rosy even without rouge; her teeth as white and transparent as porcelain, her lips lusciously red and inviting; she had the arm and hand of an Oriental queen, and the foot of an infant.

Bannière, as his eyes rested upon her, leaned against the wall for support; had it not been behind him, he

would have fallen again, as he fell in the Chamber of Meditation. It was the second time that day that he had been overwhelmed by the gorgeous beauty of that woman.

"The matter is, my poor Olympe," said the orator, "that you can go back to your dressing-room, and undress."

"Undress! and why so?"

"Because we do not play this evening."

"Indeed!" she retorted, with the pride of a veritable queen; "we do not play this evening! Who will prevent us from playing, please?"

"Look around you, dear friend."

"I am looking."

As she spoke, Olympe's eyes made the circuit of the green-room, embracing in their itinerary Bannière with the rest, but resting no longer upon him than upon the others. Only, when these two stars passed before the novice, each of them let fly a spark. One of the sparks put his brain in a whirl, the other set his heart on fire.

"Are we all here?" the orator asked her.

"Why, yes, I should say so," replied Olympe, thoughtlessly.

"Look carefully; one of us is missing."

Olympe removed her eyes from her corsage where she was adjusting a piece of lace, and turned them again upon her companions.

"Ah! yes," she cried, "Champmeslé! Where is Champmeslé, pray?"

"Ask Monsieur," said the orator.

He seized the novice by the hand and shoulder, and pushed him towards Olympe.

It was a curious sight to see the Jesuit scholar, all black and squalid, face to face with this queen of beauty, all white and gold.

The young man's lips moved, but to no purpose; he could not articulate a word.

"Well, Monsieur, speak!" said Olympe, imperiously.

She fascinated him with a glance from her wondrous eyes.

"Madame," stammered Bannière, passing from deep crimson to the pallor of a corpse,—"Madame, pardon me; I am only a poor student of religion, and I am not accustomed to such sights as I see at this moment."

The orator in a few words acquainted Olympe with all that had taken place.

"You mean to say that all that you tell me is true?" said she.

"Ask Monsieur."

She turned again towards Bannière, and questioned him with her queenly glance.

"It is true," said Bannière, bowing as if Champmeslé's fault weighed heavily upon him.

Olympe remained for a moment mute and thoughtful, with contracted eyebrows, while her eyes were still fixed absently upon Bannière.

Suddenly she said with increasing irritation,—

"No, no, Champmeslé's departure must not and shall not prevent the performance."

Every one looked at her in amazement.

"No," she repeated, "no, it is out of the question for me not to play this evening, and I will play."

"All by yourself?" queried the orator.

"Why, nobody is missing but Champmeslé, so far as I can see."

"That's quite enough. Who will play Hérode?"

"Why, some one must—"

"What?"

"Read the part."

"Read the leading part at the first performance! It is impossible!"

"Come, come," said Olympe; "there is no time to lose; the audience is waiting, and will soon lose patience."

"But," muttered several of the actors, "we cannot have a part of such importance read! When the announcement is made that somebody will read the part of Hérode, the audience will demand their money back."

"But I tell you I *must* play this evening, nevertheless!" cried Olympe. "I must!"

"Why not tell the audience something now? Why not pretend that somebody is ill? In that way we can gain half an hour, and meanwhile we can chase after that damned devotee, bring him back, willy-nilly, even if we have to choke him, put on his costume in spite of him, and push him onto the stage. Come, let us make an announcement at once!"

"But suppose you fail to lay hands on him?" suggested a voice.

"Very well; then the audience will be prepared. We can say that the sick man is much worse. We will catch him during the day to-morrow, and have the success to-morrow night which we ought to have to-night. With the assurance of a performance to-morrow, perhaps the people will not ask for their money, but will be satisfied with an exchange of tickets."

"No, no," said Olympe, "it is to-day, not to-morrow, that I propose to play; not to-morrow night, but to-night, that I mean to make a hit. Either the part will be read to-day, or I will not play to-morrow."

"What are your reasons, pray?" the orator asked her.

"My dear fellow," was Olympe's reply, "my reasons are my own: if I should give them to you, you might

possibly not find them satisfactory, while to my mind they are unanswerable. I propose to act to-day, to-day, to-day!"

Having expressed her will in this peremptory fashion, Olympe began to tap her foot on the floor, and open and shut her fan with that degree of haste and excitement which in a nervous woman indicates the approach of a terrible paroxysm.

Bannière had followed every one of the beautiful queen's movements, his eyes devoured her, he hung breathlessly upon each word that she uttered, and he felt a sympathetic twinge of the nervous irritation from which she was suffering.

"Why, Messieurs," said he, "do you not see that this lady will be ill and faint, and perhaps die of grief, if you do not read the rôle of 'Hérode'? *Mon Dieu!* Read it for pity's sake! Is it so very difficult to read a part? Ah! if I only were not a Jesuit! if I only were not a novice!"

"Well, suppose you were n't a novice," cried the orator, "what would you do, pray?"

"*Parbleu*, I would play the part," cried Bannière, carried beyond himself by the emotion which Olympe's growing impatience aroused.

"What! you would play it, — you?" exclaimed the orator. "You are joking!"

"Why should I not?" said Bannière, proudly.

"In the first place you need to know the lines."

"Oh! if that is all, I do know them."

"What! you know the part?" cried Olympe.

"Not only Hérode's, but every other in the play."

"You know Hérode's lines?" repeated Olympe, taking a step towards him.

"To prove what I say," said Bannière, stretching out

his arm, and strutting as tragedians strutted in those days, "here are Hérode's entering words."

And he began to declaim: —

"Eh quoi ! Sohême aussi semble éviter ma vue ;
Quelle horreur devant moi s'est partout répandue ?
Ciel ! ne puis-je inspirer que la haine et l'effroi ?
Tous les cœurs des humains sont-ils fermés pour moi ?
En horreur à la reine, à mon peuple, à moi-même,
À regret sur mon front je vois le diadême.
Hérode, en arrivant, recueille avec terreur
Les chagrins dévorans qu'a semés sa fureur.
Ah ! Dieu ! "

All the actors, lost in amazement, crowded around Bannière, who would have gone right through to the end of the scene, had not Olympe interrupted him. "He knows it! he knows it!" she cried; and the actors applauded enthusiastically.

"Well, well!" exclaimed the orator, "here is a lucky chance!"

"My dear Monsieur," said Olympe, "you have n't an instant to lose. Take off that shocking Jesuit's robe, which makes you ugly enough to frighten one; get into the costume of Hérode, and to the stage — quick, quick!"

"But, Madame — "

"You have the calling, my young friend," Olympe continued, "and that is all that is necessary; the rest will come later."

"To say nothing of the fact that you will never have such another fine opportunity to make your début," added the orator.

"Come," said Olympe; "make an announcement, and bring Champmeslé's clothes at once. Just look at him! Oh, he is a fine-looking fellow, — not a calf's head like

Champmeslé. There's an Oriental Monarch for you! there's a physique and a voice that are worth while! Oh, be quick, be quick!"

Bannière uttered a cry of inexpressible alarm. He felt that at that moment his whole destiny was in the balance. He would have resisted, but Olympe seized his hands. He would have spoken, but Olympe laid her pink fingers upon his lips. At last, bewildered, with brain whirling like a drunken man's, he allowed himself to be carried off by the dressers, who made a King Hérode of him in ten minutes in Champmeslé's own dressing-room.

Olympe, standing at the door, hurried on the costumers and the hairdressers, maintained her power over the novice by words of encouragement, and kept up an incessant tattoo on the floor, crying, "Come! come!"

Bannière saw his despised monkish garb thrown into a corner, as it was taken from him piece by piece; and ten minutes later he emerged from his dressing-room, in magnificent and radiant attire, really beautiful in face, transfigured, and as superb as the queen herself, who completed her subjugation of his heart by embracing him.

From that moment Bannière, utterly vanquished and subdued, did not utter a single word; he pressed his hands upon his wildly beating heart, and let them lead him into the wings, where he was just in time to hear the following deliverance of the orator to the audience:

"Messieurs, our comrade Champmeslé, who had shown some signs of indisposition during the day, has been attacked with a sudden chill. The attack is so serious that we have some apprehension that he may be lost to us and to the stage. Fortunately one of our friends, who knows the rôle, has consented to undertake to act it in his place, so that the performance may not fall through;

but as it is his first appearance on any stage, and he is entirely unprepared for this début, he bespeaks your kindest indulgence."

Fortunately for the débutant, Champmeslé was not a public favorite; and so the whole assemblage, who had felt that something out of the common was happening on the other side of the curtain, applauded with great vigor.

The applause had not entirely died away when the signal was given for the curtain to rise, so that the enthusiasm of the audience might not have time to cool; and amid perfect stillness and breathless expectation, the play began.

Let us now explain why it was that Mademoiselle Olympe de Clèves persisted so obstinately in playing "Hérode et Mariamne" on that particular evening.

X.

OLYMPE DE CLÈVES.

MADEMOISELLE OLYMPE DE CLÈVES, who was called "Olympe" for short in the dramatic company, — the lovely creature whose face we have already seen on two occasions, once in the street procession and again upon the threshold of the green-room, and who had produced so acute an impression upon Bannière at each appearance, — Olympe de Clèves was a young woman of good family, who had been carried off from her convent by a musketeer lover in 1720, when she was barely sixteen.

This musketeer, after remaining faithful to his mistress for a year, — an almost unheard of circumstance in polite circles at that time, — left her one fine day, and she never saw him again.

Olympe thus deserted, and with no hope for the future, — for she did not dare to return to her family, and did not choose to go back to the convent without any dowry, — sold the few jewels which she still possessed, and after a year's study made her début upon the boards of a provincial theatre.

She was so lovely that she was hissed. She appreciated the truth of the paradox that when Nature had done so much for a woman, it was more than ever necessary that Art also should do much for her. She set to work, in good earnest this time; and after another year, appearing at a different theatre, she was as heartily applauded for her talent as she had been, as we have said, hissed for her beauty.

Gradually, and passing from one troupe to another, Olympe had mounted to the level of the theatres in the large cities, and she enjoyed a twofold reputation as an excellent actress and a virtuous woman,—a living enigma to lovers and men of wealth.

It was not so much that Olympe was naturally virtuous, but she had learned to hate all men from her experience of one man; and as wounds sink deeper in the most loving hearts, there was still an open, bleeding wound in the heart of the forsaken fair one, even after five years.

Abbés, officers, financiers, actors, and fops,—Olympe trod them all under her feet for three years.

At last, on a certain day, or evening, at Marseilles, Olympe noticed in the wings a man of great personal beauty and most distinguished bearing. He was dressed in the uniform of the Scotch guard, and wore the insignia of a captain.

Olympe had been playing a small part in which she had made a great hit, and as she left the stage she was surrounded by a great number of men.

At least twenty gentlemen, of the highest distinction, came up and said to her,—

"Mademoiselle, you are charming;" or, "Mademoiselle, in my eyes you are adorable."

The cavalier whom we have mentioned drew near, and said to her with the greatest respect, before the whole company, "Madame, I love you."

Then, without another word, he saluted, stepped back a few paces, and mingled with the crowd of Olympe's admirers.

This sentence, thrown at her so bluntly, annoyed Olympe at first blush by its oddity, and afterwards by the effect produced upon those who were present.

She asked of the young people about her the name of that extraordinary disciple of Cupid.

She was told that it was Louis Alexandre, Comte de Mailly, Seigneur de Rubempré, de Rieux, d'Avecourt, de Bohard, du Coudray, etc., captain-lieutenant of the Company of Scottish Guards.

"Aha!" was her only comment; and she returned home alone, as her custom was.

She had at that time an engagement of eight thousand livres per year. She had received from an elderly relative, who had remained her friend notwithstanding the escapade of the musketeer and her adoption of the dramatic profession, about thirty thousand livres, which she was spending at the rate of six thousand a year, being thus assured of an income of fourteen thousand livres for at least five years, while waiting for a better engagement.

She sometimes received in her own apartments, and did it very handsomely too. In fact, her receptions gradually acquired some little celebrity in the provinces; so that every fashionable man's first care was to obtain an introduction to Mademoiselle Olympe. No aspirant had ever failed.

It is true that all the gallant things which had been invented to say to the fair hostess had been so much time thrown away; everybody was welcome, but no one was favored above the others.

A still more extraordinary thing was that no one boasted of having been so favored.

Upon returning home on the evening in question, Olympe found herself involuntarily thinking of Monsieur de Mailly.

"He will adopt the usual course," she said, "and I shall see him here my first reception day,—that is to say, the first day that I am not in the cast."

But she was mistaken.

The Comte, who did not miss a single play in which

she took part, came behind the scenes to salute her after each performance. But he did so without saying a single word, or taking any more definite step.

This course of proceeding was very surprising to Olympe; she could not doubt that the Comte was deeply smitten with her. Love never fails to manifest itself unmistakably in every movement of the true lover.

Was he bashful, then, this captain of gendarmes? It was hardly probable.

Then why, after having declared his sentiments so frankly, was he waiting? For what was he waiting?

"I wonder if he imagines, by any chance," thought Olympe, "that because I am only an actress, I hold him in sufficient reverence, as a grand seigneur, to seek him out and reply to his declaration with a similar one of my own."

She waited for the Comte to make some further venture; but the Comte made no move.

Olympe then adopted the plan of turning her back upon him when he came to make his regular nightly salute.

It was an heroic, perhaps dangerous step. Monsieur de Mailly, a man of thirty-three at this time, holding a good place at court, a worthy gentleman in his own right, very highly connected, possessed of social and military rank, was gladly welcomed everywhere by both sexes. The insult of an actress might not only wound and disgust the Comte himself, but many other people who were connected with him.

But she was a daring creature, this same Olympe. She allowed Monsieur de Mailly to approach, looked him full in the face, and when he had made his customary obeisance, she coolly turned her back without acknowledging it in any way.

The Comte felt the blow; he flushed to the roots of his hair, straightened up, and took his leave, without seeming to notice the commotion excited among Olympe's courtiers by the rebuff she had administered.

The next day Monsieur de Mailly appeared again. Many people had in the mean time cautioned Olympe that she was incurring considerable risk by her impertinence.

But she cared so little, the hothead! that when Monsieur de Mailly approached she turned away from him before he saluted her at all.

The Comte was not disconcerted. On the other hand he walked straight up to her, and said to her abruptly, but with perfect courtesy,—

"Good-evening, Mademoiselle."

As he spoke, he placed himself so that she could not avoid him.

Every one was looking on at this little comedy with an interest easily understood.

Olympe made no reply.

"I had the honor, Mademoiselle," said Monsieur de Mailly, "to bid you good-evening."

"And you did wrong, Monsieur," she retorted in a loud voice, "for you should have guessed that I would not reply."

"If you were an ordinary actress," continued Monsieur de Mailly, "and should put such an affront upon me as I have received, I would write a note to the governor of the city, requesting him to punish you for your impertinence; but as you are not an actress simply, I forgive you, Mademoiselle."

"But if I am not an actress and nothing else, what am I, pray, Monsieur?" demanded Olympe, fixing her great, wondering eyes upon the Comte.

"This, I think, is not the place to tell you, Mademoiselle," replied Monsieur de Mailly, maintaining the exquisitely courteous address which had been his strong arm of defence; "the secrets of the nobility are not to be thus cast to the winds of the wings."

Olympe had heard too much not to desire that Monsieur de Mailly should say more; so she walked resolutely to a corner of the stage, and beckoned to him to follow her.

He obeyed.

"Now speak," said she.

"Mademoiselle," he began, "you are a young lady of family."

"I?" said Olympe, in open-mouthed amazement.

"I know it to be so, and to that is due the respect which I have always shown you, even when you have insulted me, and for no earthly cause; I know, I say, your whole life, and nothing can make me regret my conduct towards you, not even your harsh treatment."

"But, Monsieur —" Olympe began, deeply moved.

"Your name is Olympe de Clèves," pursued Monsieur de Mailly, imperturbably, "You were educated at a convent on Rue de Vaugirard. My sister was there at the same time. You left the convent three years and a half ago, and I know under what circumstances you left it."

Olympe turned pale; but as her cheeks were still covered with rouge, only her lips became white.

"In that case, Monsieur," she rejoined, "you were making sport of me the other day when you said —"

Olympe checked herself.

"When I told you that I loved you?" continued Monsieur de Mailly. "No, Mademoiselle, I was not making sport of you; on the contrary, I was telling you the truth."

Olympe made a gesture implying doubt.

"Allow me to smile at a speechless passion" — Monsieur de Mailly raised his hand — "or at one which speaks but once, I should say," said she.

"Mademoiselle, you did not understand me, I see very clearly," replied Monsieur de Mailly. "I saw you and knew you; I knew you and loved you; I loved you and told you so, I told you so and proved it."

"Proved it!" cried Olympe, thinking that at last she had her adversary at a disadvantage. "Proved it! You mean to say that you have proved that you love me?"

"Certainly I do. When one loves an actress, one says to her: 'You please me exceedingly, Olympe, and, upon my word, I will love you, if you choose.' But when one pays his addresses to a lady of quality, to Mademoiselle de Clèves, one says to her nothing but this: 'Mademoiselle, I love you.'"

"And when one has said that, as I admit that you have done," retorted Olympe, with a disdainful laugh, "one waits for the lady of quality to bring her reply in person."

"One waits not for what you suggest, Mademoiselle, but one waits until a woman who has suffered on account of the desertion of her first lover, and has never consented to listen to a second because of her hatred of all mankind, — one waits, I say, until that woman, transformed and disarmed by the respectful conduct of a refined man, brushes away her hatred little by little to listen to words of love. That is what one awaits, Mademoiselle."

"It would have been better, then," said Olympe, trembling with emotion, "it would have been better, it seems to me, to say nothing at all to that woman."

"Why so, pray, Mademoiselle? The respectful homage of a gentleman cannot be distasteful; and in the first

place it proves his delicacy, secondly, it tells of hope of better days to come, and lastly, it indicates that the woman upon whom it is bestowed might make a worse choice. That is all I undertook to prove to you, and I am only too happy if I have succeeded."

She lowered her eyes for a few seconds, and then raised them to his with the light of affection shining in their depths.

The Comte did not need that she should speak. He took her hand.

"Have I made myself understood?" he asked.

"Ask me that in a week," was Olympe's reply. "And when I am used to the thought, ask me if you are beloved."

With these words she raised her hands to the Comte's lips and was gone, leaving him trembling with joy.

The Comte, instead of following her, inclined his head respectfully, and walked back towards the officers, who questioned him about the explanation they had had.

"Was it tempestuous?" said one.

"Did it hail?" asked another.

"Was there thunder and rain?" was the jocose inquiry of a third.

"Messieurs," replied the Comte, "Mademoiselle Olympe is in very truth a most adorable creature."

With these words he left them. They watched his exit wonderingly; but a few days elucidated the mystery.

XI.

A FIRST APPEARANCE.

THREE years have passed since that revelation. Olympe having been separated from her lover three or four times by the exigencies of war or garrison duty, had felt the bond which united them grow gradually weaker. In 1727 Monsieur de Mailly was still in garrison at Marseilles, while Olympe was playing in comedy and tragedy at Avignon.

For two months she had not seen the Comte; it was only the night before that he had sent word to her that, being compelled by the duties of his new office of commandant of gendarmes, to which he had just been appointed, to go to Lyons, he proposed to take Avignon in his way, and attend the first performance of "Hérode et Mariamne."

The reader may ask, perhaps, why Monsieur de Mailly, wealthy and amorous as he was, had allowed Mademoiselle Olympe de Clèves to remain on the stage. We will reply that the matter did not depend upon him. He had indeed suggested to the actress that she should abandon the profession; but having become an actress by necessity, Olympe had allowed to enter her empty heart a passion which was as consuming as the other, in a different way,—the love of her art. So she had frowned upon every suggestion of the sort, declaring that nothing in the world would tempt her to renounce her freedom of action; she accordingly continued to spend her fourteen thousand

livres yearly, accepting from Monsieur de Mailly only such gifts as commonly pass from lover to mistress, and clinging to her profession as a resource against evil days.

Twenty times had the Comte renewed his entreaties to that effect; twenty times had Olympe rejected them. We know that Olympe wanted what she wanted very badly, and was especially wilful in respect of not wanting what she did not want.

Now she had replied to the Comte's letter that he could pass the following day tranquilly at Avignon, and that "Hérode et Mariamne" would be given in the evening. That was a Thursday; so it was absolutely necessary that "Hérode et Mariamne" should be performed on that Thursday. This explains why Olympe had so obstinately persisted that the part should be read, and had embraced Bannière when he agreed to act it.

It may be that Olympe depended upon the success she was likely to make in this part to rekindle her lover's affection, in which she had thought for some time that she could detect a slight abatement; it may be, on the other hand, that we are supposing her to have a desire which she had not, and that she had no ulterior object, — for black darkness prevails in the female heart in regard to all matters connected with the mysteries of love.

We left Bannière, dressed for the rôle of Hérode, at the moment when the three strokes of the bell announced the rising of the curtain.

Monsieur de Mailly, with all his staff, was in the large box opposite the stage. He had shared with the rest of the audience their anxiety as to the state of affairs in the wings; every one was asking, "Will there or will there not be a performance?" The assemblage, which was a large and brilliant one and bursting with impa-

tience, breathed freely when they heard the signal and saw the curtain rise.

We cannot undertake to say whether it was fortunate or unfortunate for Bannière that he had no part in the first and second acts; but we do know that after each act he was sadly in need of the encouragement afforded by the presence of Olympe, who, to keep him in good heart, came behind the curtain to rehearse the principal scenes with him.

The cause of the gravest anxiety and preoccupation to the wretched novice was not the Pope's legate, who was present at this solemn function, nor Monsieur de Mailly and his staff, nor the municipal authorities, who sat in the front row: it was the two Jesuit fathers who weighed heavily upon his conscience; for he was as sure that they were there as if they had come expressly to watch for his appearance, and who could say that they would not recognize him despite his beard and his royal cloak?

So it was that Bannière was seized more than once with an irresistible desire to take to his heels. But two things prevented,— the attraction which bound him to Olympe, and the close watch which was kept upon him. There was not a soul, from the leading actor to the lowest supernumerary, who did not know that he was making his début almost by surprise, that he had exchanged the frock of a novice for the costume of Hérode; and as, all things considered, he might very naturally be attacked with remorse like that which had got the best of Champmeslé, they did not choose that the same cause should lead to a similar result, and that the play, which had come very near not beginning, should be exposed to the danger of not being played through after it was once begun.

Therefore Hérode was actually guarded by his guards,

who left their places and followed his every step in the wings as unremittingly as we have since seen the guards of Monsieur de Nangis follow their sovereign lord, in the drama of "Marion Delorme."

At last the curtain which had fallen upon the first and second acts rose upon the third; the fateful moment was at hand. Bannière, more dead than alive, heard the lines flow on one after another, and at every line that was recited he felt his own doom approaching. Although the actors on the stage spoke in the ordinary time, it seemed to him as if they were hurrying like madmen; the scenes succeeded each other before his eyes, like those dismal mists which the tempestuous westerly wind blows up beneath a lowering sky. At last came the third scene of the third act, which immediately precedes Hérode's entrée. Like a rising sea, the unhappy Bannière watched the moment for him to enter draw near; soon there were but four lines between him and that supreme moment, — soon again but two, but one! With the last measure Bannière's brow was bathed in cold perspiration. A sort of dizziness came over him, and he looked about to see if there was any opening for him to make his escape; but even as he turned, he saw the smiling face and enheartening glance of Olympe. He heard around him a whisper of "Come! come!" He felt a little hand, mightier than the hand of a giant, push him from behind, and a sweetly modulated voice whisper, "Courage!" The breath with which this word was uttered burned his cheek. He took a step forward and found himself before the footlights, before the great chandeliers, before three thousand rays gleaming from the eyes of the spectators, among which eyes, shining with infernal brilliancy, he fancied he could recognize those of the two reverend Jesuit fathers.

He entered slowly, gasping for breath, bewildered, and ready to pitch forward headlong at each step on the gradual slope of the stage.

But he was so handsome and well-made, his face wore such a gloomily melancholy expression; he had so well-turned a leg, and an eye so full of fire that a perfect thunder of applause, intended partly to encourage him and partly as an acknowledgment of his obligingness, arose throughout the great audience, who moved hither and thither, impelled by the attraction of curiosity, as a field of grain bends and waves beneath a summer wind.

The effect was instantaneous; the film which covered Bannière's eyes passed away, the blood which hummed in his ears ceased its surging, and, electrified by the bravos as the race-horse is by a word of praise or by the spur, he gallantly attacked his opening lines.

He was absolutely sure of one thing, — his memory, — but he was by no means sure of his personal appearance. The latter made an excellent impression, and half the battle was won.

Stimulated by the applause, Bannière acquired renewed strength; he said to himself that after all he was a man like other men, the equal in intelligence of the people in the hall, and very possibly the superior in talent of those upon the stage.

The result was that he delivered his tirades almost as confidently upon the stage as he had done in the green-room. In default of science, he had force; in default of by-play, he had fire; and as Olympe said to him in a low tone, "Good! good!" several times during her first scene with him, he acted very well indeed; for he acted as he might have done in the Chamber of Meditation, without realizing the danger.

As for Olympe, who had long been at home on the

stage, and who, instead of two malevolent Jesuit fathers among the audience, had Monsieur de Mailly and a whole staff of adorers there, she allowed herself to be carried away by her part, as she never would have done with Champmeslé perhaps, and did not let slip a single opportunity to score a point, sustained as she was by the approving murmurs of the whole hall and the noisy bravos of the garrison.

It was a capital performance. Bannière not only made no mistake himself, but he actually gave their cues to nearly all the others. The reader will remember that he knew the whole piece by heart.

So it was that after his first entrée he was overwhelmed with congratulations by the whole company, men and women alike. But after his second entrée, he had for him only the women, who, it must be said, remained faithful in their admiration to the end of the play.

When the end arrived, Olympe did not embrace Bannière again; she thanked him.

Bannière was too giddy to notice the distinction; the man who is tipsy from drinking poor wine, no longer appreciates the bouquet of choice vintages.

Bannière, then, was congratulated, flattered, and made much of; he tore himself away from all this adulation, for he still retained in a vague way the hope of returning to the novitiate, and took refuge in the dressing-room where he had changed his clothes.

He had much difficulty in finding it, but succeeded at last.

The first thing he discovered on entering the room, was a bath. As if to wash the stain from his body with water at the same time that he cleansed his soul by confession, Champmeslé was accustomed to take a bath after each new rôle that he played. Bannière eyed the bath

enviously; he thought that since he had taken Champmeslé's part, he might justly take his bath too. From deduction to deduction he soon succeeded in convincing himself that he had every right to the bath, while Champmeslé had not one.

He removed the Hèrode costume, and stretched himself out luxuriously in the bath.

He had been there ten minutes, rubbing himself vigorously with Champmeslé's soap, and passing in review, as in a dream, all the incidents of that eventful performance, even to the least detail, when some one knocked at his dressing-room door.

Bannière started nervously in his bath, like a thief caught in the act.

"Well, what is wanted?" he asked. "You can't come in."

Bannière was modest to the last degree.

"I do not wish to come in, Monsieur," replied the voice of the hair-dresser. "King Hérode is wanted."

"Where?"

"In the green-room."

"What do they want of King Hérode?"

"Monsieur le Comte de Mailly is giving a supper to the gentlemen and ladies, and says that the party would be incomplete without King Hérode, as Queen Mariamne attends."

Bannière did not reply for a moment; but then he reflected that he had no other clothes to put on than his Jesuit suit, and that he would cut a sad figure at this joyous banquet in such sombre guise.

"Say that I thank Monsieur le Comte de Mailly with all my heart for the honor he has done me," replied the novice, "but that I cannot accept, having no coat."

"What, no coat?" said the hair-dresser; "have n't

you the costume of King Hérode, all ermine, silk, and velvet?"

"Yes," said Bannière; "but that is a costume, not a coat."

"Why," said the hair-dresser, "everybody is in costume; indeed, it is one of the conditions of the supper."

"Mademoiselle Olympe too?" Bannière ventured to ask.

"In full costume. She has merely taken off her paint and plaster, and taken a bath; that is why they are not yet at table."

A supper with Monsieur de Mailly; a supper presided over by Olympe; a supper where he should see her once more, where she would tell him that he had acted well; above all else, a supper at which he would make his appearance, not in the filthy novice's frock, but in the magnificent Hérode costume! In all those considerations there was more than enough to determine Bannière to postpone his return to the novitiate two hours more. Besides, they either knew of his escape or were still in ignorance of it; if the latter, two hours would make no difference, whereas if they already knew of it, the punishment would be so fearful in any event that two hours more could scarcely increase it.

Bannière was in the position of a man condemned to be hanged, and who for the sake of an hour of delicious enjoyment risks being torn on the wheel. Since death is death, Bannière desired to indulge first in such pleasure as only the gods know.

So he replied quite nonchalantly,—

"Very well, then, say to Monsieur de Mailly that I shall have the honor to accept his invitation."

He emerged from his bath, radiant and exhaling perfume. To the stage paint had succeeded the deep brown

tint of the skin which is the distinguishing mark of the men of the South; in place of the flowing wig appeared the waving black locks, to which the water had imparted the glossy bluish tint of the crow's wing. He viewed himself in Champmeslé's mirror, and for the first time realized that he was handsome.

But at the same moment he said to himself with a sigh,—

"Ah! and she, too, is very beautiful."

He then made the best of his way to the main foyer, where the feast was spread.

XII.

THE SUPPER.

Olympe, as the hair-dresser told Bannière, had gone down to the green-room. But there a surprise awaited her. She found Monsieur de Mailly and his officers, in travelling-dress, booted and spurred. During the ten minutes which Olympe had passed in her dressing-room, the Comte and his staff had effected this rapid change of toilet.

With the most melancholy air that he could command, the Comte then informed Olympe that during the play he had received an express from the king; that his Majesty demanded his immediate presence at Versailles, and that he should have set out at once upon receipt of the express, in accordance with the respect which he owed to the king's command, had he not given to his respect for his mistress the preference over his respect for the royal person; that he had consequently, as soon as the curtain fell, given the word to his officers to prepare themselves for a journey, and had allowed them only ten minutes in which to do it.

They were all there, as we have said, in the green-room when Olympe entered.

Having saluted her, the Comte turned to the other ladies.

"Mesdames," said he, "accept our salutation and seat yourselves at the table."

It was at this moment that Bannière appeared at the door. Upon hearing the cry of surprise uttered by two or three of the actresses, Olympe turned about.

Bannière, in truth, deserved the tribute of admiration which his presence evoked; it was impossible to imagine a handsomer or more distinguished-looking youth than he.

Olympe uttered no sound; she simply looked at him in astonishment, that was all.

Monsieur de Mailly nodded carelessly.

Bannière crossed his hands upon his chest, as Orientals and Jesuits do, and bowed low. He found it quite natural to make one of the most respectful and most courteous salutations imaginable.

Monsieur de Mailly addressed a few complimentary words to the young man, while Olympe smiled her approval. Then he took a glass, filled it with champagne, and handed it to Olympe, poured out a second glass for himself, and said as he held it aloft, —

"To the king's health, Mesdames and Messieurs."

The officers had followed their commander's example, each of them, glass in hand, first holding it aloft, and then draining it to the king's health.

Monsieur de Mailly then turned to Olympe.

"And now, Madame," said he, "we drink to your grace and loveliness."

This toast, as we can easily conceive, was drunk with acclamation by the whole company except Bannière, who had not the courage to drink a second glass, although he had found the first very good.

It was not that Olympe was not in his eyes as fair as Venus herself, but the toast was proposed by Monsieur de Mailly, albeit with perfect courtesy, yet with a certain tone of proprietorship which tore poor Bannière's heart.

Monsieur de Mailly, who had, on the other hand, the best of reasons for drinking, placed his glass on the table after he had drained it to the last drop, and taking

Olympe's hand in his, said to her as he pressed a kiss upon it, —

"Farewell for a little, dear heart."

Olympe made no reply; it seemed to her that there was something peculiar in the Comte's manner towards her. So she contented herself with letting her eyes follow him as far as the door; then her glance returned to the company and fell upon Bannière.

He was very pale, and was leaning upon a chair, as if without that support he might fall.

"Come, my king," said Olympe to him, pointing to the chair at her right, "take the seat which the Comte should have occupied. Honor to whom honor is due."

Bannière obeyed mechanically, and seated himself, trembling like a leaf.

At this moment they heard the footsteps of the officers' horses galloping off on the Lyons road.

Bannière breathed again, while Olympe could not repress a sigh.

However she took her place at the table; and as her self-control was very great, she seemed to banish her preoccupation with a toss of the head.

The supper was at an end; the ladies and gentlemen, freed from the restraint of the officers' presence, found the occasion much more enjoyable. Bannière, above all, had seen Monsieur de Mailly take his departure with a satisfaction for which he could hardly account, but which he did not take the trouble to conceal.

Actors, especially those whose lot is cast in the provinces and who do not eat every day, generally have excellent appetites; and Monsieur de Mailly's repast was done full justice to.

Bannière, seated beside Olympe, ate and drank, but in a most nervous and embarrassed frame of mind; he said

not a word, and while he devoured the eatables and drinkables with both hands and mouth, — we must remember that he had had nothing to eat for thirty-six hours, — he devoured his lovely neighbor with his eyes.

She, like a sensible girl, did not seem to regret the departure of the officers; she did the honors of the feast with admirable grace; she even carried her good-humor so far as to make all the men gloriously tipsy by doubling the number of bottles ordered, and having the extra supply charged to her.

Every moment added to the exaltation of Bannière, for at every turn his eyes met his fair neighbor's eyes, and his hand met hers. And so, towards the close of the banquet, he was no longer an ordinary mortal; he called himself Roscius, Baron, the genius of Comedy.

The trouble was that he was over head and ears in love, and slightly tipsy. His pale and melancholy beauty had become transformed into beauty of a more brilliant cast. From his eyes shot all the flames of love and wine.

It then became Olympe's turn to lower her eyes; and the modest queen understood that it was time for her to leave the table; accordingly she rose, courteously wished her comrades much pleasure, said good-night, and left the room, without any signs of anger, but with perfect dignity.

She had had only water to drink.

When they saw her rise and prepare to take her leave, the men undertook to get on their feet and return courtesy for courtesy; but at least half of them, who had had great difficulty in retaining a sitting posture, as soon as they tried to execute the other movement, stumbled and fell over the other half, whose legs were protruding from under the table.

The women did as Olympe had done, with this variation: as they withdrew, they passed in line before the young man, and each gave him a farewell kiss, as if they were about to part forever, since Bannière was going back to the convent.

As the last one performed this ceremony, Olympe, who was just crossing the threshold, looked around and saw the bashful Joseph wiping his lips.

She smiled and disappeared.

Thereupon Bannière, left alone amid these topers who cumbered the floor of the green-room as uprooted trees cumber the ground, fell a victim to despondency unutterable.

In short, with Olympe's departure, the dream had ended, and stern reality had supervened.

Reality! That is to say, instead of the golden heaven in which he had lived for two hours with gods and goddesses, the convent where he should see none but black-robed mortals; instead of the green-room, brilliant with many lights, where the acclamations of the audience and the clinking of glasses could still be heard, the Chamber of Meditation, with its dry bread and clear water, and its dismal inscriptions.

All this was not very seductive to the imagination, and yet he must needs go and submit to it all again.

Slowly he crossed the supper-room, walking carefully to avoid stepping upon the bodies of the unlucky combatants, who had succumbed to the rattling storm of chambertin and champagne. He was as sad at heart as a victorious general visiting the battlefield where he has left half of his army. One would have said it was Pyrrhus after the battle of Heraclea.

He returned to the room where he had dressed; the lights were dying out: he revived the almost extinct

flame, and began to search for his novice's clothes which he had left in a corner.

To his utter amazement they had disappeared.

At first he thought that his dresser must have thrown them behind a door or into some wardrobe; he felt behind all the doors, and opened all the wardrobes, but to no purpose.

After fifteen minutes' search, he gave it up and went downstairs again. The concierge alone was left in the theatre; dressers, coiffeurs, and wing-boys, all had gone.

The concierge eyed him narrowly.

"Did those things belong to you," he said, — "a black cloak, black breeches, and a hat like a quartern loaf?"

"Yes, they did belong to me."

"Well, well! but they would not become you so well as the costume you are wearing at this moment."

"Have you seen them, pray?" said Bannière, anxious for an explanation.

"Certainly I have," was the reply.

"Where?"

"*Pardieu!* on the back of Monsieur de Champmeslé."

"What do you say? on the back of Monsieur de Champmeslé?"

"Yes! He came back to his dressing-room; as he went in, he saw your clothes, and he at once made the sign of the Cross."

"Without speaking?"

"Oh, no! He said: 'Beyond question, it is the will of God, since he sends me not only the inclination, but the very dress of a monk.'"

"And then?"

"Then he removed his civilian garments, and put on your novice's suit."

"But what became of the clothes he took off?"

"He gave them to his dresser, on condition that his wife should say five Paters and five Aves a day for him for a week."

"Is it long since he went away?"

"Oh, it 's more than an hour."

It was enough to turn the poor fellow's head, and Bannière was completely bewildered by this development.

If it were a serious matter to return to the novitiate at two in the morning in the garb of a Jesuit, it was vastly more so to appear at that hour with the costume of King Hérode.

However an idea suggested itself to him. It was not an hour likely to be selected for parading the streets, even when dressed as a Jesuit; and Champmeslé must have gone home.

"Where does Monsieur de Champmeslé live?" he asked.

"On Grande-Rue, opposite the statue of Saint Bénezet, next door to Mademoiselle Olympe."

"Mademoiselle Olympe!" Bannière could not help repeating the name, with a sigh. "Mademoiselle Olympe! Ah!"

As he still showed no purpose of moving, the concierge said,—

"Come! what do you propose to do? I must lock up here; it is high time. You can sleep in your bed all the forenoon to-morrow, while I must be up and at work again at six o'clock."

Bannière smiled bitterly.

Sleep in his bed all the forenoon! There was considerable doubt about that!

"Well, well," the concierge repeated; "did n't you hear me? Monsieur de Champmeslé lives on Grande-Rue, opposite Saint Bénezet's statue, and next door to Mademoiselle Olympe."

"All right, I hear you," said Bannière, "and I will prove it by going there."

Like a man whose mind is made up, he darted bravely into the street, still clad in the Hérode dress.

The concierge closed the door behind him.

XIII.

IN WHICH CHAMPMESLÉ CAUSES BANNIÈRE SERIOUS EMBARRASSMENT.

Bannière took the direction indicated by the concierge. He found the statue of Saint Bénezet, and directly opposite was a house which he judged to be that of Champmeslé.

But the house was as dark and gloomy as the remorseful and fearful heart of him who dwelt therein. All the shutters were closed except one, through which one could see that all was dark within as well as without.

The house beside it, on the other hand, — the one which the concierge had described as Olympe's, — was alive with that pleasant, cheerful light which indicates that no lonely vigil is being kept, although its inmates are yet awake. The blinds were drawn on the first floor, it is true, and that was the only floor which seemed at the moment to be occupied; but one could see through the interstices a rose-colored light, which, softened by curtains of silk, indicated the boudoir, or the bedroom perhaps, of a pretty woman.

Bannière-Hérode looked at that lovely rose-tinted light, sighed, and knocked at Champmeslé's door.

But to all appearances, the deserted aspect of the house did not belie it, for to Bannière's three vigorous blows there was no response.

He struck six blows. Still silence.

He struck nine blows.

Up to that time Bannière had adopted the plan of doubling and trebling the number three, which the gods like, as is well known; but receiving no response to his three times three, he lost his patience, and began to beat a tattoo on the door, which soon aroused the dogs in three or four neighboring houses, and they began a concert in which all the deep and shrill tones of the canine gamut were represented. Undoubtedly the hammering and the concert which it evoked, produced a more or less disagreeable impression upon the tenant of the next house, for one of the blinds with the beautiful rose lining opened, and a young maidservant, the typical Marton of the comedy, with her blue cap over her ear, put her head out through the opening, and in a bitter-sweet little voice asked, —

"Pray, who is making such an uproar at such an hour?"

"Alas, Mademoiselle Claire, it is I," Bannière replied.

He had recognized one of Olympe's maids; and as Olympe had called her by name before him, and he had not forgotten a syllable that Olympe said, he remembered her name.

"Who are you?" asked the girl, trying to pierce the darkness with her bright eyes.

"Bannière the débutant."

"Ah, Madame," cried the giddy soubrette, turning to speak to her mistress, who was still invisible, — "ah, Madame, it is Monsieur Bannière!"

"Monsieur Bannière, do you say?" asked Olympe.

"Yes; and — and — oh, Madame, forgive me if I can't help laughing, but the poor boy is still in his costume of King Hérode."

"Impossible!" cried Olympe, who could not conceive

any emergency which would compel Bannière to parade the streets in such guise.

"But it's so, it's so," insisted Claire. "Is n't it true that you are still dressed as Hérode, Monsieur Bannière?"

"Alas, yes, Mademoiselle," said the unhappy novice.

"But Madame will not believe me."

A ray of hope entered Bannière's mind.

"She has only to come to the window," said he, "and she can make sure of it with her own eyes."

Bannière brought into play, in uttering this sentence, the most pathetic notes of which his voice was capable. They went straight to Olympe's heart; and she, half inclined to laugh and half touched, approached the window, where Mademoiselle Claire respectfully made way for her, although, to gratify her curiosity, she remained close behind her mistress, standing on tip-toe and peering over her shoulder.

"Is it indeed you, Monsieur Bannière?" Olympe began.

"Yes, Mademoiselle."

"What are you doing there, pray?"

"Why, you see, Mademoiselle: I am knocking at Monsieur de Champmeslé's door."

"But Monsieur de Champmeslé is not at home."

"Alas, I fear you are right, Mademoiselle."

"What do you want of Monsieur de Champmeslé at this hour?"

"I want him to return my clothes, Mademoiselle."

"What clothes?"

"My novice's clothes, which he found in his dressing-room, put on his own back, so it seems, and went off with."

"Oh, you poor boy!" murmured Olympe.

Bannière did not hear the words, but he saw the gesture which accompanied them, and understood it.

"Madame," said he, "Monsieur de Champmeslé has not yet come home, but he must come home sooner or later."

"Surely he must at some time or other."

"I am convinced of it, Madame; but I cannot wait for him at his door in such a costume as this."

"Why not?"

"Why, because the day will soon be here, Mademoiselle; it is at least three o'clock, and if I am seen in this costume, I am lost."

"Lost?"

"Yes, lost in order to do you a service."

"How are you lost?"

"Because I am a novice at the Jesuits."

"Ah, so you are, poor fellow!"

"Madame," Bannière ventured to say, "if you would allow me to come into your house?"

"I beg your pardon?"

"I would gladly wait wherever you choose, — in your dining-room, or parlor, or reception-room."

Olympe turned around to consult Claire.

"*Dame!*" exclaimed the maid; "I say, Madame, that a woman must have a very hard heart to leave such a fine fellow at the door."

"Ah, indeed!"

"I thought that Madame meant to ask my opinion. I beg pardon if I have given it without being called upon."

"No, no; on the contrary, you did just right, for I did mean to ask your opinion, and it agrees with mine."

"Madame," Bannière asked at this point, "what have you decided to do with me?"

"Show him up, Mademoiselle," said Olympe to her maid, "and let him come into the adjoining room."

"Madame realizes that that room is mine."

"Very well; when he is in your room, we will decide what to do."

Claire darted to the door to execute the order. Olympe cast a last glance at poor Bannière, who was holding his arms out to her as a shipwrecked sailor might to the lighthouse on the shore, and closed the window.

For a moment Bannière lost courage. In making his request he had feared that he was a little over-bold, so that when that rose-lined blind was closed upon him he thought that he was shut out beyond recall.

In his very natural despair he set to work again upon Champmeslé's door, and was hammering away furiously, when he heard the next door open very softly.

The same head with the coquettish blue cap appeared, and Bannière saw, so to speak, the word "Come" issue from two rosy, smiling lips.

He did not wait for the word to be repeated; he rushed into the hall, and Mademoiselle Claire closed the door behind him; then, as he found himself in utter darkness, a little hand sought his, and having found it, drew him gently forward, while the same sweet voice, which sounded to Bannière's ears like that of a messenger from heaven, whispered, "Follow me."

Nothing could be easier than to follow when this charming, perfumed guide went before. Bannière found a staircase with a sharp turn in it at the end of the hall; but he was forewarned by a pressure of the hand of every obstacle. Thus it was out of the question that any mishap should befall him.

Arrived at the top of the stairs, he was shown into Mademoiselle Claire's bedroom. Only a single door, but

that fastened with a double lock, separated him from Olympe's apartment.

Claire went to the door.

"Here we are, Madame," said she.

"Very good, Mademoiselle," replied Olympe, who was listening on the other side of the door. "And are you there too, Monsieur Bannière?"

"Yes, Madame," said Bannière, "and very grateful for the favor you have granted me."

"That 's of no consequence. So you say that you lack the proper clothes in which to go back to the convent, and that it would be difficult for you to go back in the character of King Hérode?"

"I think it is not possible, Mademoiselle."

"Very well; then I will give you others."

"Clothes?"

"Yes."

"The devil!" muttered Bannière, who was rapidly losing his anxiety to go back to the novitiate; "that 's not what I want."

He added aloud,—

"I thank you most sincerely, Mademoiselle."

"What! do you propose to accept the clothes?" Claire interrupted in an undertone.

Bannière, delighted to find his own inclinations seconded, made a sign with his hand, which meant, "Never fear."

"By the way," he continued, "I left the convent in a curious way."

"How was that?" Olympe asked.

"I came out by the window."

"By the window?"

"Yes. I ought to say, Mademoiselle, that I was a prisoner in the Chamber of Meditation."

"For breaking the rules of the order?" queried Olympe, laughing.

"For learning the tragedy of 'Hérode' by heart, Mademoiselle."

"Ah! really?"

"I discovered that the chamber had a masked window; I unmasked it, and through the window I saw — ah! Mademoiselle, it was what I saw through the window which led me to destruction."

"What was it that you saw, in God's name?"

"I saw the procession of Hérode and Mariamne. I saw you raise your veil to salute Monsieur de Mailly; and —"

"And what?" Olympe persisted.

"And you seemed to me so beautiful, Mademoiselle, so beautiful, that I swore I would see you act that same evening."

Mademoiselle Claire made a wry face.

"Ah! really?" exclaimed Olympe again.

"So I made a sad wreck of the hangings of the Chamber of Meditation, let myself down from the window, ran like a madman toward the theatre without thinking that I had no money to pay for my seat. Suddenly I saw two Jesuit fathers on their way to the play. I sought shelter in the lobby, and there met Monsieur Champmeslé, who was running away; behind him came his comrades running after him. As I was the only one who could give positive information about him, they dragged me off to the green-room; there I told the whole story. You came in; I saw that you were in despair at the idea of postponing the performance, and I thought you more beautiful even than in the procession. Your despair tore my heart, I forgot everything under the spell of your radiant presence. I said, 'I shall be ruined, to be sure;

but no tear shall dim those lovely eyes;' and I am ruined, Mademoiselle. That 's the whole story."

"Oh, the viper!" muttered Claire.

"Is it really true?" rejoined Olympe, in a voice deeply moved; "did things really happen as you say?"

"Upon my honor, Mademoiselle."

Something like a sigh was audible on the other side of the door.

"After all," said Claire, joining in the conversation, "it seems to me that Monsieur Bannière's affairs are not so desperate as he says."

"Explain yourself," said Olympe.

"Monsieur came out through a window."

"Yes," said Bannière.

"It was dark when you came away?"

"Almost dark."

"Your flight is probably not yet discovered."

"Probably not."

"Very well, then, just get back through the same window."

"Yes, indeed," said Olympe, "let him go back through the same window that he came out of."

These words were accompanied by another sound resembling a sigh.

"That is just where the difficulty lies," said Bannière.

"Difficulty!" repeated Olympe, quickly; "how so? Tell me."

"The window is very high."

"Oh, well, you can find a ladder," said Claire.

"A ladder? where?" asked Olympe.

"Even so, it will have to be a very long one," added Bannière.

"We have a very long one in the garden," said Claire.

"It must be at least thirty feet in length," said Bannière.

"Oh, it 's fully that."

"Yes; but a ladder of that length requires at least two men to carry it, put it in position, and hold it."

Mademoiselle Claire had no answer ready for this argument.

There was silence for a moment on both sides of the door.

"Well," said Olympe at last, "I fear it will be very hard for you to get in by the window, if the window is so high."

"Oh, it is even higher than I said," Bannière hastened to add.

"What are we to do then?" said Olympe.

"Madame," said Bannière, "you will not be so cruel, I hope, after giving me a moment's shelter, as to turn me out of your house, and leave me exposed to the chilly air, and the anger of the Jesuits."

"Monsieur Bannière cannot stay here, however," said Mademoiselle Claire, sourly; "for this is my room."

"You are both right," said Olympe, opening the door; "you are right. Mademoiselle Claire, show Monsieur into my dressing-room."

As she spoke, she pointed to a door on the other side of her apartment, opposite the one which led into Claire's quarters.

"There is a couch there," she added; "and a night is soon passed when it is half-past three in the morning in the month of May. Go on!"

Mademoiselle Claire had not a word to say; the imperious, yes, royal gesture which accompanied the last word admitted no rejoinder. Bannière, too, instead of following Mademoiselle Claire, went on ahead this time.

He walked across the room with a step light as air, scarcely touching the floor, bowed low before the beauti-

ful fairy, who had made a different man of him in half a day, and disappeared in the dressing-room.

Claire followed him, and when she reached the door, —

"Well, Madame," she asked, "what is to be done now?"

"Why, the bolts are to be thrown on my side of the door, and you are to come and undress me. It is time, I think, is it not?"

Mademoiselle threw the bolts, and returned to her mistress, who held out the sleeve of her peignoir that she might assist in taking it off.

"But, Madame," said Claire, as she performed this office, "suppose Monsieur de Mailly should come back as he said?"

"Well, suppose he should come back?"

"What shall I say to him?"

"You will tell him just the truth, that 's all."

She finished taking off her peignoir with her own hands, and dismissed the maid with a gesture. Claire withdrew with lowered head, and going through an expressive pantomime which meant, —

"*Ma foi!* I don't know what to make of this."

XIV.

THE CABINET OF MEDITATION.

ONCE in the cabinet, Bannière had fallen into a luxurious easy-chair, on the seat and back of which lay various articles of clothing which Mademoiselle de Clèves had but just laid aside.

The pleasant warmth which exhaled from them seemed to have permeated the cabinet from floor to ceiling, impregnating the atmosphere with a subtle, intoxicating perfume.

Bannière, in a state of nervous exaltation, tremulous and feverish, buried his face in his hands, and asked himself if all that had happened to him was not a dream, like one of those infernal dreams which the mocking adversaries of the Holy of Holies used to visit upon the unhappy monks in their cells in the early days of Christianity.

He passed it all in review: the procession of Hérode and Mariamne, his flight, the slender ankles and diminutive feet of the ladies of Avignon, the actors' lobby, the green-room, the performance, the supper, the kisses which the ladies of the play had bestowed upon him, the chambertin and champagne, the wilderness of plump white shoulders which had surrounded him; and then Olympe's eyes, her nervous white hand pressing his arm, her teeth,— those pearls to which God had given so beautiful a setting,— her lovely teeth, hidden to be sure, but which shone upon him in a sudden smile at the beginning of the feast!

And oh! the flitting across that lovely rose-colored chamber, the gilded bedstead with lace coverlid standing in a satin-lined recess; the rose-tinted light, the intoxicating perfume, everything in short that he had seen and felt in five short seconds; Olympe in a simple peignoir, her hair free from powder, and falling about her shoulders, — all this, in combination with the tirades of Hérode, the bravos of the audience, and a feeling of dread which from time to time made Bannière's heart stand still, made such a hurly-burly in his brain as would have driven the most sober-minded of men mad.

He heard Olympe dismiss her women; he heard the rings of the bed-curtains slide along their golden rod; he heard the dainty bed creak beneath the weight, light as it was, of the body which intrusted itself to it.

Then he looked about him for the first time.

An alabaster lamp, suspended from the ceiling by a silver chain, lighted a fascinating dressing-room, in which the mirrors and consoles, as well as the ewers and basins, were all of Saxon manufacture; in Bannière's eyes, after a hasty glance around, it had no defect except the lack of transparency of its walls.

As we have said, the tempest of emotion evoked in Bannière's brain by his recent extraordinary experiences and his present situation amounted to frenzy, and became almost insupportable under the additional incentive of his overmastering passion for her who was so near at hand, and yet as far away as if the ocean rolled between them.

He rose from the easy-chair, and began to pace madly up and down in his narrow quarters, muttering incoherently to himself, and recklessly regardless of the objects which lay in his path. The existence of such objects was soon brought home to him, however, with embarrass-

ing distinctness, and the melodrama was near becoming roaring farce, when his foot came in contact with a foot-warmer, and he fell heavily against the door which communicated with Olympe's apartment.

The noise of his fall brought him to himself, at the same time that it aroused some apprehension in his mind, for it was an absurd noise.

But it was still worse when he heard Olympe's voice asking,—

"For Heaven's sake, what are you doing in there, Monsieur Bannière? Are you tearing down the partition?"

"Oh, Mademoiselle!" replied the unhappy youth in a woe-begone voice, which gave to his exclamation all the force of a sigh.

"Well, what is it? You are not ill, are you?"

"Oh, Mademoiselle," he repeated with the same inflection, "I am on the rack."

"Poor Monsieur Bannière!" said Olympe, in a tone of mock sympathy, "what has happened to you? Do tell me."

"It is very hard to tell, Mademoiselle."

"Bah!"

"One thing I do know, however, and that is that I am damned, for certain."

"What! Just because you have acted in one tragedy? Nonsense! I have acted in more than a hundred, and have strong hopes of salvation, notwithstanding."

"Ah! it's a very different matter with you, Mademoiselle; you are not a novice at the Jesuits."

Olympe began to laugh at his dolorous accent, and her apparent scorn increased his despondency tenfold; he expressed it by long-drawn sighs, which became absolutely heart-rending where they had been simply melancholy.

"Come, come, my dear comrade, we must go to sleep," said Olympe, quite seriously; "it will soon be four o'clock."

"Impossible, Mademoiselle, impossible! I had some champagne to drink, and my head is in a whirl. I saw your eyes, and my heart is on fire."

"Oh, *mon Dieu!* that is a downright declaration."

"Mademoiselle!" exclaimed Bannière, clasping his hands as if he could be seen on the other side of the door.

"I begin to be of your opinion; you certainly will be damned, Monsieur Bannière, if you don't look out," continued Olympe.

"Mademoiselle," cried Bannière, in a frenzy, "do not laugh at me. I am freezing and shivering and burning up all at once. Oh, I verily believe that this is what is called being in love, mad with love!"

"Is it not rather what is called being tipsy, my poor fellow?"

"Oh, no! If you but knew! My head is calm, comparatively speaking. It is my heart, my heart, my heart, which beats more and more madly. When I hear your voice, when I hear — Ah me! I feel as if I were dying."

"Go to sleep, go to sleep, dear Monsieur Bannière."

"Mademoiselle, ever since the first moment I laid my eyes on you I have felt that I had ceased to be my own master."

"My dear Bannière, every letter I receive — and I receive a great many — begins with just those words."

"Happy they whom you have allowed to demonstrate the truth of what they have written, Mademoiselle."

"Poor boy! do you happen to have a ray of intelligence about you, dear Monsieur Bannière?"

"Alas! I don't know, Mademoiselle."

"Oh, well! I pity you with all my heart, if what you say is true. Go to sleep."

"Oh, you pity me, Mademoiselle," rejoined Bannière, noticing only the first phrase, and ignoring that humiliating imperative which had already been injected into the conversation three or four times,—"oh, you pity me; but that proves that you have a kind heart."

He shook the door by way of peroration.

"My dear friend," said Olympe, laughing, "you prove to me in return that you have strong hands."

"Ah! there you begin to make sport of me again," said Bannière. "If you only knew how small a thing it would take to comfort me; only one kind word, and I am sadly in need of it. You have no idea how mad I must be to speak to you so boldly. No, I am no longer master of myself, I am demented."

"Let the door alone, Monsieur Bannière, or I call my women."

Bannière obeyed, and leaned against the door instead of shaking it.

"I tell you that I am a madman," he continued. "God is already chastising me for the sin into which the devil led me. Love! alas, it is not for me that yours is reserved; what am I, after all? A mere clod, a speck of dirt, a poor miserable wretch! Oh, I am lost irrevocably, I assure you!"

"Monsieur Bannière," said Olympe, in her most serious tone, for she began to realize that there was real suffering underneath this farcical scene,—"Monsieur Bannière, you are all wrong to excite yourself so. There is in you the stuff of a good fellow, and a clever fellow too; more than that, I believe that you possess a kind and honest heart."

"Oh!" exclaimed Bannière.

"You have an attractive face, too," continued Olympe; "you will get along famously with the ladies, believe me."

"You only in all the world do I care to please, — only you, only you."

"But you are a novice at the Jesuits."

"Ah! yes."

"And so long as you have not cast your frock to the dogs — "

"Oh, Mademoiselle, it has already been cast to the dogs, or soon will be, if — "

"If what?"

"Oh, what 's the use? With or without my frock, she whom I aspire to please will never look at me."

"She whom you aspire to please is myself, is she not?"

"Oh, yes, Madame, you, you!"

"Thanks! for you say that in a way that leaves no room for doubt; and believe me a woman is always grateful to the man who truly loves her. To such a man she owes, if not a love equal to his own (for a woman is not always mistress of her affections), at least the whole truth. Well, dear Monsieur Bannière, my heart is given to a worthy gentleman, one Monsieur de Mailly."

"Alas!" sighed Bannière, who felt that that was indeed an insurmountable obstacle.

"And as I wish to steal nothing from any one, Monsieur Bannière, and as our mutual promises are as binding as an honorable man and woman can make them, I beg you, for your own sake, to think no more of the subject now occupying your mind."

"Occupying my mind!" cried Bannière, humiliated, crushed, — "occupying my mind! she calls this torture 'occupying my mind'!"

"You heard what I said, my dear neighbor," said Olympe, firmly; "in ten minutes you have learned more

about me than any other will learn in ten years. Now, dear Monsieur Bannière, take this torture of yours more philosophically, stretch out on your cushions, and go to sleep."

"Good-night, Mademoiselle," replied Bannière, dismally enough; "I have to ask a thousand pardons for all the embarrassment I have caused you, all the foolish things I have said to you, and the absurd annoyances I have subjected you to. At last, Mademoiselle, I realize the whole extent of my misfortune. So from this moment, have no fear, Mademoiselle, you shall have nothing more to reproach me for. Sleep, Mademoiselle, sleep; my despair now is speechless,— the most cruel of all for him who experiences it, but less burdensome for her who causes it."

Olympe made no reply to this discourse; she composed herself once more to sleep; and the noise made by her bed-curtains drowned another noise, which Bannière, if he had heard it, might have taken for a sigh.

He, poor fellow! buried himself in the easy-chair, and resigned himself to the anguish of immobility.

He had just fallen into a state of torpidity rather than sleep, when he heard a loud knocking at the street door.

Bannière started up, and listened with all his ears; every sound was an event, in his state of mind.

He heard sounds in the adjoining room which indicated that Olympe too was listening.

After a moment's interval the street door opened and closed; then Bannière heard the door of Olympe's room open, footsteps on the floor, and the rattling of the bed-curtains.

It was a terrible blow for Bannière, who thought he saw in the incident proof that she had lied to him, and was false, too, to her sworn fidelity to Monsieur de

Mailly, galloping along the Lyons road. His courage gave out; he slid from the chair to the floor, rolled himself up in the Herodian cloak, and lay like a dead man.

Never had he suffered so intensely.

Suddenly he heard an exclamation of surprise in Olympe's room.

With the cowardice of all lovers who are jealous, he listened with all his ears.

"Who brought this letter, pray?" demanded Olympe,

"Good! it is only a letter," thought Bannière.

"A dragoon, Mademoiselle; he came at full gallop, and as soon as I had the letter in my hand he was off as fast as he came."

"Mademoiselle Claire's voice!" exclaimed Bannière; "better and better."

"This is an extraordinary proceeding!" said Olympe, with a quiver in her voice.

After a pause, she added,—

"Go back to bed, Claire."

"Very well, Madame."

Claire took a step or two toward the door.

"One moment—" said Olympe.

Claire stopped.

"Unlock the door of that dressing-room."

"The room where the Jesuit is?" queried Claire, with an accent of most profound astonishment.

"Yes."

Claire unlocked the door, and Bannière rose to his feet in a flutter.

"What next?" asked Claire.

"Assist me to dress," said Olympe; and after a few moments of hasty movement, she added,—

"Beg Monsieur Bannière, if he is not asleep, to do me the favor to come and speak with me a moment."

Bannière, it is needless to say, was on his feet before the words were uttered.

Claire opened the door behind which the poor novice had shivered and suffered so much. She saw Bannière standing before her.

"He is not asleep, by any means," Claire told her mistress.

"So much the better," said Olympe; adding in the next breath,—

"Be kind enough to come here, Monsieur Bannière, I beg you."

"Mademoiselle —"

"That is to say if you have no objection," said Olympe, smiling.

Bannière stepped into the room with a pale face and wildly beating heart.

In a low chair by the bedside, in the soft rays of a float-light burning in perfumed oil, Olympe, clad in the same simple peignoir, seemed to the bewildered novice as fair as Venus rising from the foam of the sea.

Near her stood the femme-de-chambre, in a charming negligée, fit to break the heart of the most devout of novices.

Olympe's cheeks were flushed, her forehead and eyebrows were knit, her eyes flashed fire. She held an open letter in her fingers, which were as rosy-tipped as Aurora's own.

"Come here, Monsieur," said she.

"Umph!" thought Bannière, "she is going to show me the door. The letter is a command to that effect from Monsieur de Mailly. I am at the end of my tether."

"You may go, Mademoiselle." said Olympe to Claire.

Claire stood a moment in mute amazement; then, at a sign from her mistress, she bowed and left the room, with

the air of one who makes up her mind to obey, without comprehending.

Bannière, finding himself standing alone by Olympe's side, was seized with downright vertigo; under sentence of death and bound to the stake, he could hardly have been more ghastly or more tremulous.

"She has sent her maid away so as not to humiliate me before her," he said to himself. Oh, poor Bannière!

Olympe raised her eyes, still gleaming with anger, to the novice's face.

"Monsieur," said she, "read that letter, please."

"Here we go," thought Bannière, trembling as with the ague.

However he took the letter, and read: —

My dear Olympe, — Everything has an end in this world, and love is no exception. You love me from sentiment, and on my side I reproach myself with having no longer that ardent passion for you which you deserve to inspire. But my friendship has survived my love; and the king, by recalling me, has shown me how deep and earnest that friendship is, by the regret with which I leave you.

You would have been the woman to wait for me forever, for you are loyalty personified. I myself break the bonds which may be a source of vexation to you.

Open your wings, beautiful dove!

I have left in your secretary two thousand louis, which I owe you, and a ring which I beg you to accept.

Do not wonder at my writing to you. I should never have dared to say such brutal things to your face.

Au revoir, and without ill feeling.

Comte de Mailly.

"Oh, *mon Dieu!*" cried Bannière, in the first impulse of his heart, after he had read the letter. "Oh, Mademoiselle, how unfortunate you are!"

"I?" retorted Olympe. "You are mistaken. I am free; that 's all."

Before Bannière had time to readjust his emotions, there was a second knocking at the street door, quite different from the first and much more vigorous.

XV.

THE JESUITS AT THE PLAY.

BEFORE divulging to our readers the identity of the latest intruder upon the privacy of our hero and heroine, it is indispensable, in our opinion at least, to return for a few moments to certain personages, who, although undoubtedly of less importance, ought not, nevertheless, to be altogether neglected, being considerably interested in this portion of this veracious history.

We refer to the Society of Jesus, which we have slighted somewhat during the last three or four chapters. Particularly we refer to Père Mordon and Père de la Sante, who are, in our judgment, of too much importance to the plot to have their rôles thus cut.

We have said that the Jesuits went to the theatre; at this time abbés and priests were permitted to go, in order to judge of the literary merit and the moral tendencies of the play. It was an established fact that the preacher might properly borrow from the histrionic artist some of his gestures and tricks of elocution. Whatever redounded to the glory of God was looked upon as fair game, especially by the Society of Jesus.

"Ad majorem Dei gloriam" was the Society's motto.

It might therefore be of the utmost consequence to the glory of God that the reverend fathers Mordon and De la Sante should go to listen to the periods of that heathen Voltaire, declaimed by those renegades of actors.

Doubtless Père Mordon in one of his sermons, and Père de la Sante in one of his sacred tragedies, would

make good use of some morsels of gold found in that dungheap. *Margaritas in sterquilinio.*

This explains why Bannière, hidden behind his pillar, had seen two Jesuits, at the hour for the play to begin, alight from their carriage at the door of the theatre, after devoutly taking their place in line.

We have said that at that apparition Bannière was so terrified that he lost no time in seeking a place of refuge in the lobby. His terror was so great that he had only taken time to espy the ends of their robes, and the crowns of their hats. These two extremities of the vestments of the reverend fathers were enough to make him quit his position with the utmost haste.

It would have been quite another matter, of course, if he had been able to guess at the identity of the illustrious persons by whom those robes and those hats were worn.

As for the good fathers, they did not see so much as the hem of the robe, and the hat-brim of Bannière; and with all our confidence in their penetration, we venture to say that, even if they had seen them, they would have been a long way from divining that among the three hundred young people in their charge, the one who darted off so quickly before them was the captive of the Chamber of Meditation.

Thus the worthy fathers entered the theatre without a thought of Bannière, and took possession of a little box with a grating in front, — a battery whence they could fire hot shot at Voltaire, and gather the spoils in tranquillity, thereby doubly benefiting the cause of religion.

Père de la Sante, who had confessed Champmeslé the day before, anticipated a certain degree of pleasure in seeing his penitent yielding to his weakness, and committing the sin he so abhorred; and although the

confessor had been indulgent, the critic threatened to be correspondingly severe.

Just as his eyes beneath their thick black brows were beginning to glitter with hostility, which in this excellent man had a touch of good-humor, the orator of the troupe disturbed his pleasant anticipations by announcing the indisposition of Champmeslé and the obliging offer of a substitute.

The good fathers grumbled a little; but they, like all the others, had to submit patiently, and becoming interested during the progress of the first two acts, where much is said about Hérode, but he does not appear, they had almost forgotten the substitution when the Syrian King made his entrée in the third act.

This entrée, which we described in its proper place, made as deep an impression upon the two reverend fathers as it had done upon the rest of the audience; but after a few seconds, strange thoughts began to pass through the minds of both.

The voice, the gait, and what could be seen of the face (the beard and the wig, it will be remembered, concealed a large part of it),— all these reminded the Jesuits of some person of their acquaintance, but so vaguely and indistinctly, and it was such a far cry from Hérode clad in silk and velvet to Bannière in his black robe and sugar-loaf hat, that both exhausted the whole list of their acquaintances without thinking of Bannière. But all of a sudden, by a gesture, the pronunciation of a word, or a familiar mannerism, the débutant betrayed himself to each of them, so that each said to himself instantaneously, but still under his breath, for neither dared to put in words so absurd an idea: "It is Bannière!"

The result was that a few seconds after that ray of

light had shone in upon their minds, Hérode having by a bit of fine declamation and an impassioned outburst won the admiration of the pit, and aroused a tempest of applause, Père de la Sante, so far carried away by his artistic temperament as to join in the demonstration so sweet to an actor's ear, cried aloud,—

"That rascal played Isaac altogether too well not to make a good Hérode some day!"

This exclamation fell in so well with the thought which was springing up in Père Mordon's mind, that he turned his blazing eye upon Père de la Sante, and demanded, seizing him by the arm, —

"Is it not he?"

"I confess," replied the writer of Latin tragedies, "that if you refer to a resemblance —"

"Extraordinary, is it not?"

"Miraculous."

"Between this actor and little Bannière?"

"Between this actor and little Bannière, yes."

"It strikes you then as it does me?"

"That is to say that I would swear to it, if —"

"So would I, if I were not silenced by a doubt."

"What is it?"

"Why I locked Bannière up in the Chamber of Meditation."

"Yourself?"

"Myself."

"Well?"

"Well," said Mordon, smiling, "you know, my brother, that there are excellent locks on the doors of that apartment."

"That is a good reason," muttered Père de la Sante; "and yet —"

"And yet?"

"It is so exactly his voice, his step, his gesture; and I am so familiar with them too, for I made the rascal rehearse — "

"Do me a favor, my brother."

"At your service, reverend sir."

"Go to the novitiate and find out."

Père de la Sante made a wry face. To be disturbed in his pleasant occupation was not agreeable to him; and his conviction that Hérode and Bannière were one and the same person began suddenly to weaken perceptibly.

"The more I consider, reverend sir," said he, "the more I think that we are mistaken. Look again at the fellow on the stage."

"I am looking at him," said Père Mordon.

"Well, that man is a consummate actor, while little Bannière has never walked the boards in his life."

"Except under your direction."

"Oh, a college performance is not enough to educate a man for the stage."

"Very true; and yet — "

"Look again, sir; this man before us has command of gesture, majestic bearing, and real eloquence; little Bannière could not have all that."

"Hum!" rejoined Père Mordon, "a true calling gives to some what long practice sometimes denies to others."

"Agreed, agreed! but just see how the eyes of that actor devour Mariamne! see how languishing and affectionate is Mariamne's manner toward this Hérode whom she ought to abhor! I, who confess many lovers, can assure you those eyes have long known one another."

"Very well; but why should not Bannière, who is so perverted, have known this actress for a long while?" demanded Père Mordon.

"Because if he knew her, I should have heard of it," said Père de la Sante.

"You would have heard of it?"

"To be sure, for I am his spiritual director."

With this the discussion came to an end, and the Latin tragic poet was left to contemplate the French tragedy in peace. After a subdued exclamation, which told of suspicion almost dispelled, Père Mordon also began to attend to the action of the play once more; but his remaining doubts were more openly displayed, because he had no reason to conceal them.

These doubts lasted as long as the play.

When the curtain fell for the last time, the two Jesuits hurried back to the novitiate.

Everything was quiet about the house; there was no indication of that commotion which is always caused among those in authority by the discovery of an escape or a scandal.

Nevertheless this appearance of security only half reassured Père Mordon, who could not banish the thought that Hérode and Bannière were the same man. He was no sooner in the porch than he began the solution of his doubts.

"Has supper been carried to the novice in meditation?" he asked.

"Why, my father," replied the person addressed, "your Reverence did not so order."

"True enough. Is there some one in the corridor?"

"The watchman, as usual."

"A lantern, and let some one light me thither!"

The attendants obeyed.

When he saw the locks all in position, and the door quite intact, Mordon smiled, and De la Sante rubbed his hands.

"We were mistaken," said the latter: "*induxit nos diabolus in errorem.*"

"When one escapes," rejoined Mordon, less easily reassured, "it is seldom by the door."

"But there are no windows in the Chamber of Meditation," said Père de la Sante.

"Fingit diabolus fenestras ad libitum," retorted Mordon.

"Bannière!" called Père de la Sante. "Bannière! Bannière!"

Each time that he called he raised his voice a tone.

But Bannière could not reply.

The two Jesuits looked at one another, as who should say, —

"Oho! Will Hérode and Bannière turn out to have been the same man, after all?"

The question must be decided one way or the other; and by order of Père Mordon the door was opened.

Then the sad spectacle of the unmasked window, the torn hangings, the lacerated and maltreated inscriptions, burst upon the sight of Père Mordon and Père de la Sante.

"It was indeed he whom we saw as Hérode," said the former, with an angry ejaculation. "I suspected it not only from the way he declaimed his lines, but because I heard him prompting all the others. The villain when he handed me the copy of the play admitted that he knew it all by heart."

"Mea culpa, mea culpa!" cried Père de la Sante, beating his breast.

"Here 's another villain," said Père Mordon, "who would like to escape us as that accursed Arouet has."

"Oh, so far as that goes," rejoined Père de la Sante, "you need have no fear. The villain — and he is a

villain indeed — has only one resource; rabbit or fox, he must come back to his hole. Very well, teach him to play such tricks again by taking away his rope; he will be at his wits' end, for he reckons doubtless upon getting in the same way he went out. Cut these strips of tapestry, and the fugitive will be compelled to knock at the door, shamefaced and contrite."

"Take away his rope!" cried Mordon, eagerly. "Why, you are mad! rather than take it away, I would substitute for it a silken ladder with steps, if I could find one. The only question is, will he come back?"

"For God's sake, what do you suppose will become of him?" asked Père de la Sante, unfeignedly dismayed at the thought, then first occurring to him, that Bannière might have taken wing forever.

"I don't know what may become of him," retorted Père Mordon, "but I do know that he ought to be here before this."

"Perhaps he sees our light," said the other, "and it is that which alarms him."

"Yes, that may be so; and yet — But no matter, put out the light."

The light was put out, and they waited nearly a quarter of an hour, during which time Père Mordon did not vouchsafe a word in reply to the impatient suggestions of his companion.

Finally he said, —

"Well, he will not return at this hour: we have only one chance, and that is that he has passed the time we have been waiting here in exchanging his profane garb for his Jesuit's suit. Will you go to the theatre, Père de la Sante?"

"I?" said the father; "that seems hardly judicious."

"Why so?"

"Because they will recognize me and put him on his guard."

"You are right. Send the two servants; only let them not lose an instant."

The two fathers left the Chamber of Meditation, and found the two servants in the corridor.

"Go at once to the theatre," said Mordon; "ascertain whether the Jesuit who entered by the actors' lobby has or has not come out. If he has, return here; if he has not, hide in the lobby, seize him when he passes, and bring him here; gag him, if necessary, but bring him at all hazards."

Père Mordon uttered these words with the incisive brevity of a judge pronouncing a sentence which he wishes to have carried out without delay and without variation. The two servants were off at the word, and ran at the top of their speed to the theatre.

They arrived as the last stage-lights were being put out; and having learned from the concierge that he had not seen the novice who had come in go out again, they ambuscaded themselves in the lobby through which the actors usually emerged one by one, and there, hidden in the shadow, they lay in wait for their prey.

XVI.

A SOUL SAVED FOR A SOUL LOST.

But it was written on high, in the book of small causes and great results, that that day was to witness as many incidents, burlesque or tragic, as it contained hours.

During the last act of the play — just as the curtain fell, in fact, and when the whole company were crowding around the débutant to congratulate him — a man of sombre mien, pale and dishevelled, had passed through the deserted lobby, slowly mounted the rough stairs, and, without looking to right or left, or before or behind, guided by the mechanical instinct which makes it natural for one to do, without any effort or participation of the will, such things as one is accustomed to do every day, he had reached the corridor upon which the actor's dressing-rooms opened.

This man was Champmeslé himself, weary and crest-fallen, worn out by wandering like a madman through the darkest and loneliest streets of Avignon; Champmeslé, who had gone up and down more than two thousand steps perhaps during the evening, and who, having come to the end of his dreams and fears and prayers, and of his strength as well, had made up his mind to return to the theatre,— in the first place, to find out what had happened; secondly, to ask pardon of his comrades for the wrong he had done them in compelling them to submit to a pecuniary loss; and thirdly and lastly, having obtained their forgiveness, to go to sleep,

and receive when he awoke, with mind refreshed, some inspiration from above.

It is true that he could hear in the distance, in the direction of the stage, the clamor of many voices; but they had no very definite character, and might pass for murmurs of discontent as well as for applause: so Champmeslé continued to walk toward his dressing-room.

Actuated by such sentiments as we have described, and more disposed than ever to do penance, he entered that room, the very tabernacle of his iniquity.

He was hardly within the door when his eye fell upon the clothes of the Jesuit lying upon a chair, neatly folded, and forming a sort of pyramid, upon which was the regulation sugar-loaf hat, carefully brushed by the theatre-boys.

At this sight Champmeslé uttered a cry of surprise. He could not believe his eyes; he looked at the things more carefully, and touched them; finally, convinced that they were not painted but real clothes, as they say in theatrical parlance, he raised his hands to heaven and fell on his knees.

These garments which had been substituted for his Hérode costume, and were waiting for him there in his dressing-room, seemed to Champmeslé nothing more nor less than an indication from on high of the path he was to tread. He remembered nothing of his encounter with Bannière in his Jesuit's dress, and he was very far from imagining that Bannière had been carried off by force to the green-room, and led in leash by the bright eyes of Mademoiselle Olympe, to play the part of Hérode. He took no steps to ascertain, and asked no questions. This coat was in his eyes the proof of his calling, the symbol of God's will; a Jesuit's robe descended from heaven into the dressing-room of an actor, was a much

more convincing revelation than a dream. Providence in dealing with him had improved upon the hereditary visions of the family. No more doubt, no more hesitation! The coat! the coat!

From that moment he forgot his fatigue, his hesitation vanished. In the twinkling of an eye he threw off his own clothes; he donned Bannière's frock and breeches, put the novice's hat upon his head, and went forth with an air of exaltation, while his former comrades were on their way to the green-room to do honor to Monsieur de Mailly's banquet.

But Champmeslé had barely taken ten steps in the dark corridor, reciting the five Paters and five Aves which Père de la Sante had imposed upon him as a penance, when the hirelings of Père Mordon, seeing a Jesuit approach them in the half light, and reasoning that there could be no other Jesuits than themselves and Bannière abroad at midnight, cast themselves upon him, one forcing his hat down over his eyes, while the other tied a handkerchief across his mouth, and both uniting in dealing him divers vigorous blows in the ribs; then they carried him off, as two hawks might do with a sparrow they had been hunting in company.

Ten minutes later they reached the novitiate, without having attracted the attention of passers-by, who were very few at that late hour.

As they were expected, the door opened and closed again behind them almost before they had knocked; and at the same instant the triumphant exclamations of the two servants and the porter announced that Bannière was taken, and was once more within the walls of the novitiate.

"Who is it?" asked Père Mordon from the threshold of the door where he was waiting.

"It is he, Bannière, the fugitive!" cried eight or ten voices at once.

"Good!" said the superior; "take him up to the Chamber of Meditation."

Père Mordon's commands were obeyed to the letter; and the unhappy Champmeslé, still mistaken for Bannière, was carried bodily to the Chamber of Meditation, and deposited upon the floor, after performing which operation the servants withdrew, at a sign from the superior, carrying with them a smile and an approving word.

Meanwhile the sufferer, bound and gagged, and with his hat jammed down over his eyes, was no sooner released by his tormentors, than he rolled over on the floor, gasping for breath, and trying to get rid of the handkerchief which was suffocating him. De la Sante, who was soft-hearted at bottom, did his best to assist him; and the hat was first removed, then the handkerchief.

"It 's not Bannière!" cried the superior.

"It 's Champmeslé!" cried De la Sante.

They both stood, lost in wonder, gazing at the actor, while he, sitting on the floor, with haggard eyes, arms hanging by his side, and knees almost up to his nose, looked from one to the other, recognizing neither, ignorant whither he had been carried, utterly at a loss to comprehend what had befallen him, and vainly asking himself who these two persons were who had done him a good and a bad turn.

At last he recognized the dress; from the dress he went on to recognize the men, and thence the house. God was still manifesting himself to him, since he had brought him by force to the very place to which he would have been only too glad to come, if he had been sure of a welcome. He leaped to his feet, and then fell

back to a kneeling posture, with the facility of an acrobat, seizing a hand of each of the fathers.

"Oh, God be praised," said he, "for bringing me to your arms!"

At this apostrophe Mordon and De la Sante crossed themselves, exchanging a look of mute interrogation.

As the most obscure things in the world, even Spanish intrigues, are always explained in the end, the two Jesuits at last disentangled the complicated web of this affair. They left Champmeslé in the Chamber of Meditation, with the doors wide open, with no fear of his running away; and while De la Sante remained behind with full powers in case of emergency, Père Mordon hastened to the governor of the city to have official bloodhounds with keener scent than those of the novitiate put upon Bannière's trail.

The magistrate, who had been much entertained at the play, was still more entertained when he learned who the leading actor was; and his orders to seize Bannière wherever he should be found were accompanied with shouts of laughter.

The governor was welcome to cause Bannière's arrest laughing or not, for aught Père Mordon cared, provided only that Bannière was arrested; so he thanked the governor for his compliance, and was politely shown to the door by him, still in high good-humor.

Thus at the hour to which our story has advanced, everybody had succeeded according to his desire. Bannière was by Mademoiselle Olympe's side, Champmeslé was making great strides in the way of salvation, and Père Mordon was in a fair way to recover his novice. The governor laughed his heartiest as he set his archers on the culprit's track; so that Voltaire, the moving cause of all this turmoil, would have cried, if he had seen it,

as he cried twenty years later, that everything was for the best in the best possible of worlds.

The first to find himself at odds with that maxim was poor Bannière.

The gentle reader will remember that we left him radiant with happiness in Olympe's boudoir, with dilated eyes and clasped hands, and on the point of falling upon his knees, when a sudden and violent blow upon the door made him jump.

This interruption evidently portended something serious. Olympe jumped too, and signalled to Bannière with her hand to listen.

A second blow, more vigorous than the first, followed it almost immediately.

Olympe ran to the window; while Bannière, divining instinctively that this nocturnal visit had something to do with him, remained like a statue in the posture in which the first blow of the knocker had surprised him.

Olympe raised the shade, softly opened the window a little way, and peeped out between the cracks of the blind.

Through the open window Bannière could hear a confused sound as of measured steps, and words spoken in a low tone.

Olympe, without speaking, beckoned to him to come to the window; and with three steps he was at her side, looking out through the same opening.

Beneath the window were some ten or twelve men, some armed and some unarmed, while a carriage drawn by two horses stood in the shadow of a *porte-cochère*.

"What do you say to that?" asked Olympe of Bannière, in a voice so low that he guessed at her words from the breath which he felt on his face, rather than from any sound.

"Alas, Mademoiselle!" said Bannière, with a sigh. "I say that all those fellows have the appearance of wishing no good to King Hérode."

"Yes, that 's so," returned Olympe; "they can smell a Jesuit a league away. Tell me, have you the least inclination to return with those miserable black-coated fellows?"

"Oh, Mademoiselle," cried Bannière, somewhat louder than was prudent, "I would go to the end of the world to escape them!"

"'Sh!" whispered Olympe; "they heard you."

Indeed, a commissioner, easily recognized by his stiff assumption of authority and the ill-temper he displayed at having been disturbed in his sleep, — a detestable commissioner in black, flanked by two acolytes in gray, — raised his head, and, leaving the group, came under the balcony.

"Come, come," said Olympe, "we have no time to lose; it is indeed you whom they 're after. Luckily the door is a stout one, and we have at least ten minutes before us, before they will burst it open."

"Do you think that they will burst it?" asked Bannière.

"They certainly will; but in ten minutes one can do many things; that is to say," added Olympe, looking at Bannière, "when one does n't lose one's head."

"Mademoiselle," said Bannière, "only one thing could make me lose my head, and that thing is the misfortune of displeasing you; but, assured of your approval and sympathy, I would face the whole world."

"Well said!" Olympe rejoined. "Come."

"But it is my costume which embarrasses me," said Bannière, pointing to King Hérode's magnificent cloak.

"Go and change it then," said Olympe, hurrying Bannière back into the dressing-room.

She opened a great wardrobe, hidden behind the hangings, and Bannière found himself in presence of a complete outfit.

"Dress yourself without losing a second," said Olympe, "and I will do the same. You have five minutes for your toilet."

As she spoke a third blow, more vigorous than the others, resounded upon the door; and the solemn words were heard,—

"In the king's name, open!"

XVII.

FLIGHT.

THESE words were a sharper spur to Bannière than Olympe's injunction had been. In five minutes his toilet was finished, and he was just about to return in triumph to Olympe's apartment, when a charming little cavalier appeared on the threshold.

Bannière made an exclamation of surprise, for he did not recognize Olympe in her male garb until a second glance.

"Oh," he cried, "how lovely you are!"

"You shall tell me that later, my dear Bannière, and I will listen to you with great pleasure, I confess, for that sentence is one of those of which a woman never grows weary; but for the moment we have no time to lose in compliments. Come."

"Where?"

"How do I know? Wherever it shall please chance to lead us."

"To lead *us*, did you say? Pray, are you coming with me?"

"Certainly I am," replied Olympe.

"You love me then?" Bannière asked.

"I don't know whether I love you, but I do know that you are going to leave this house, and so am I. Come, are you ready?"

"Oh, am I!" cried Bannière; "I rather think I am!"

"Then," said Olympe, "not a word; do as I do, and follow me."

She went to her secretary and opened it. Monsieur de Mailly's two thousand louis were there in neat piles, — one thousand in rolls of one hundred louis each, and one thousand in notes payable to bearer.

"Take the gold," said Olympe, "and I will take the paper;" and while Olympe was stuffing her pockets with paper, Bannière was stuffing his with gold.

"Is it all right?" said Olympe.

"Yes."

"Now, take this."

"What is it?"

"My jewel-case; be careful of it."

"Never fear; but what are you looking for now?"

"A ring."

"Oh, yes!" sighed Bannière, "Monsieur de Mailly's. I think I saw it on the chimney-piece."

He ran his hand along the marble slab. "Here it is," said he.

"Give it to me," said Olympe; and she slipped it on her finger.

"Listen!" said Bannière.

"What! quickly! quickly!" cried Olympe; "the door is yielding."

"What shall we do now?"

"Do as the door is doing," said Olympe, with a fascinating smile.

She seized Bannière's hand and drew him along.

"But you don't mean it, do you?" asked Bannière in terror; "we are going right toward them."

"Trust to me," said Olympe; so he followed her into a corridor at one end of which was the staircase. A cabinet opened upon the corridor; and into it Olympe pushed Bannière, following close upon his heels.

They were hardly in the cabinet, when the staircase

re-echoed the hurried steps of the commissioner and his archers, who, arousing the entire establishment, called forth shrieks of terror from Claire and Olympe's other women.

But the hurricane passed without pausing at the door of the cabinet; and Olympe, having locked the door through which they had entered, opened another door giving access to a narrow stairway which led into a dark passage, and that in turn to a garden.

The fresh air blowing upon his face of itself made Bannière breathe more freely.

The two runaways glided under the lime-trees, until they came to a gate, and found themselves on the slope of a deserted street, through which Olympe hurried her companion.

Both were running too fast to make conversation practicable; but as they were hand in hand, they talked with their hands instead of with their mouths. Through street after street they passed, and from square to square, still running, until they came to the Ousle gate, which remained open all night.

Once without the gate they found themselves on the bank of the river, whose proximity was made evident to them by the coolness of the air even before they saw the pearly gleam through the dark trees of the promenade.

Bannière was darting off in the direction of the wooden bridge; but instead of following his lead, Olympe drew him off to the right, and began to climb down the bank like a school-boy on a marauding expedition.

Bannière followed her passively. Poor Bannière! With a silken thread she could have led him to the seventh circle of hell.

The two young people, then, were within a hundred paces of the river-side. Olympe went straight to a small

boat, the padlock of which she unlocked with a key she had been careful to take with her. They took their places in the boat.

"Do you know how to row?" she asked the young man.

"Luckily, yes," said Bannière. "When we used to go upon the river, I always did the rowing."

"Good!" said Olympe, laconically. "Row away, then."

Bannière took an oar in each hand, and bent manfully to his task.

It was no child's play, — the Rhone is broad and swift at the point where our two fugitives undertook to cross it; but Bannière had said no more than the truth: he was strong and vigorous, and also had a certain measure of skill in the management of his oars.

Sweating, and breathing hard, and with blistered hands, he accomplished the passage, without allowing his bark to drift too far down stream.

Nothing had appeared behind them to make them think that they were pursued.

Arrived on the opposite bank, Olympe, who had acted as pilot during the voyage across, fastened the painter to one of the posts of a little pier which she recognized, leaped ashore with the aid of Bannière's hand, and started off at a run again in the direction of Villeneuve-les-Avignon.

Bannière ran by her side, without asking any questions.

However the two fugitives were not obliged to run all the way to the village which could be seen, shining white in the darkness, on the hillside. Olympe, some two hundred paces from the first straggling houses, halted, quite breathless and exhausted, but still smiling, before a picturesque little cottage half covered with spreading vines.

Bannière halted beside her.

"Knock at that shutter," said Olympe.

Bannière's one thought was to obey. He knocked hard enough to bring the walls down.

"Call, 'Père Philémon!'" continued Olympe.

And Bannière shouted in stentorian tones, "Père Philémon!"

An old man's voice answered within.

"There he is! Wait!" said Olympe.

She sat down upon a wooden bench against the wall.

Soon another sound was heard within the house, — the sound of the heavy step and shuffling sandals of Père Philémon.

At this sound Olympe struck three light blows upon the shutter.

"Ah, is it you, Mademoiselle Olympe?" said a tremulous voice.

"Yes, it is I, Père Philémon," replied Olympe.

"All right! I will open the door."

"It is n't worth while. Just wake Laurent, and tell him to saddle the two horses without losing a minute."

"And you?"

"Oh, I will wait here."

"Very well," replied the old man.

And the sandals went scuffling back toward the interior of the house.

"Olympe, Olympe," whispered Bannière, breathing for the second time only since the archers had knocked at the door, "what has happened to us, *mon Dieu!* and what is that secret passage through which we succeeded in making our escape from the house?"

"Why, it is a hidden door, that 's all, my dear Bannière."

"The existence of the door was unknown, then?"

"Yes, except to Claire, Monsieur de Mailly, and myself."

Bannière sighed.

"And the boat on the river?"

"That boat belongs to the little Cabaret de la Berge,—a place little known to novices, I fancy, but very familiar to lovers, who go there to dine under the green arbors, and use the boat after dinner for a little turn on the river."

"Then you used to go on the river?" said the novice, whose heart sank deeper and deeper at each revelation made by Olympe.

"Yes, Monsieur de Mailly was very fond of this excursion," replied the young woman, tranquilly.

"And Père Philémon," said Bannière, humbly; "would it be indiscreet to ask you who Père Philémon is?"

"Not the least in the world. Père Philémon is an old servant of Monsieur de Mailly, who gave him this pretty little cottage, two acres of vineyards, and two horses, which we used from time to time in our excursions, and which we will use to-day for our flight."

Bannière sighed again, more deeply than ever.

"Well, what is it?" Olympe asked.

"Oh, well," rejoined Bannière, looking gloomily at his sleeves, "I know, of course, that I have no right to sigh about that, when all that I have, even to the clothes on my back, belongs to that gentleman."

As he spoke, Bannière looked at Olympe, as if to say to her, "Yes, everything, everything, even my clothes, even you!"

Olympe frowned, as if to plough in her own mind a furrow as deep as that which jealousy was ploughing in the heart of the novice.

But Bannière saw the cloud gathering on her brow,

and gave her no time to reflect, throwing himself at her feet with real ardor.

"Olympe," he cried, "whatever happens, receive the vow which I make you. You have sacrificed everything for me, and my life belongs to you. If you love me, — which I do not dare to hope, in truth, for in what way have I been able to attract you? — but if you love me, I, for my part, worship you! Even when you should no longer love me, — and that day would be the most wretched of my life, — you would none the less be in my eyes a divine being, the queen of my whole existence. You have drawn me up to your level; I will be worthy of you, and you shall not regret, I swear to you, the exchange you have made of the handsome, refined gentleman for the poor novice."

"The handsome gentleman who abandoned me," said Olympe, gently, giving Bannière her hand to kiss. "Have no anxiety," she continued, "and consider yourself bound in the future only by your love. You are under no engagement with me, and on the day when, like Monsieur de Mailly, you cease to love me, like him you will be free. Be sure of this, my dear Bannière; you have attracted me, I think that I love you, at all events I hope that I shall love you. While Monsieur de Mailly remained my master, you could never have been aught to me. Now I am free. Love me if you wish, love me as much as you wish; that can do no harm. I consider you a clever, lovable fellow, and accept you as such. All that you do not know of the world, of men and things, you will soon learn. If, when you are more knowing, you are not a still better fellow than you are now, I shall be much mistaken, it will be my own fault, and the punishment will fall on me. It is enough. Let us talk no more of these paltry

things. The life of two lovers ought to date only from the day when they first met; before that they did not exist, because they did not know each other. The past then is wiped out. Look! see what a beautiful, mild day it is going to be; it will be the first day of our life. As they say on the stage, all the rest has been put far behind us. Let us not raise the rear curtain behind which all the broken scenery and useless stage properties are thrown. Do you hear the horses neighing? They are in the courtyard. Give me your hand and look at me. Good! you love me. Let things take their course, — when you no longer love me, you will not need to tell me so."

Bannière grovelled at Olympe's feet, kissed them and her hands a million times, while Père Philémon, opening his shutter and his door, appeared in *déshabillé*, and offered Olympe a glass of Cahors wine and a piece of cake, smiling hospitably the while.

Then he extended the same courtesy, except that the glass and the cake were both larger, to Bannière.

Olympe asked Bannière for one of the rolls of gold with which his pockets were lined, opened it, put a double louis in Père Philémon's hand, a louis in Laurent's, leaped fearlessly upon her horse, while Bannière mounted his rather timidly; and the two, fully informed as to the road, took that which ascends the right bank of the Rhone and leads to Roquemaure, after they had arranged with Père Philémon as to the inn at which they should leave the horses.

While they are galloping along lovely roads which the summer has not yet had time to turn into mere gutters of dust, lovely roads bordered with sloping banks of turf, -leaved olive-trees, and blooming gardens; while are joyously inhaling the fresh, free air of the

morning, and hastening toward the unknown future which is always eluding one's grasp and vanishing like a phantom, we will devote a few lines of hypocritical compassion to the poor archers and unlucky commissioner, who were vying with one another in rummaging about in cabinets and bedrooms and wardrobes, in stairways, cellars, attics, and stables, in courtyards and gardens and sheds, and who finally, happily an hour too late, stumbled upon the secret door, — a discovery which evoked cries of rage, imprecations, and oaths strong enough to scandalize the Jesuits even, in whose interest they had undertaken this disagreeable task which succeeded so ill.

It is almost useless to add that the governor, when he learned of Père Mordon's discomfiture, laughed more heartily than ever.

A very delightful character was this governor of the catholic, apostolic, and Roman city of Avignon.

XVIII.

REST.

Let not our readers be astonished at the speed with which our lovers — even Bannière, who was by no means at home in the saddle — left the leagues behind them in the early morning hours. It was of the utmost importance to them to get beyond the limits of the jurisdiction in which the offence had been committed as quickly as possible; for the evasion of a novice was an offence subject to severer penalties at Avignon, a Roman city, than elsewhere.

Olympe and Bannière rested awhile at Roquemaure, where they left their horses at the inn agreed upon with Père Philémon; they then crossed the Rhone to Orange, and thence set out in a comfortable post-chaise for Lyons, — a city of considerable size, and sufficiently populous and liberal to enable two well-to-do and happy lovers to abide there without being disturbed or disturbing others.

Olympe, who was well used to breaking camp and pitching her tent in a new place, went in search of lodgings, and succeeded in finding, in the very heart of the city, near the Place des Terreaux, made memorable by the execution of Cinq-Mars and De Thou, a little house furnished throughout, which was waiting for wealthy tenants, with wood in the cellar, wine in the bins, and linen in the linen-chest; a house, indeed, made expressly, not for a grave, devout, old-fashioned hermit, but for two lazy, joyous hermits, fond of good cheer.

The price of this house, all furnished, just as it stood, with its doors thrown hospitably open and spits turning before the fire, was four thousand livres per year. Olympe informed Bannière, who was stupefied at the enormity of the sum, that it was the very best of bargains for the tenants, and the very worst for the owner, and that she could hardly believe that such a prize had really fallen at the first attempt into the hands of two reprobates, whom the Jesuits did not hold in the highest consideration, and whom they ought certainly by their maledictions to have involved in the everlasting disfavor of Providence.

They paid the rent for two quarters in advance; they paid for the wine and wood, for everything, in short, that was necessary to insure them six months of undisturbed happiness; and when Bannière saw another gold louis make its way from his store into the pockets of a stranger, — which was happening every moment we must say, — and when he would follow it with his eyes as far as possible, Olympe would say laughingly, —

"What we bought was necessary, was it not?"

"Why, yes," would be Bannière's reply; for he did not know what it was to have a different opinion from Olympe.

"And whatever is necessary contributes to our happiness, does it not?"

"To be sure," Bannière would reply again, gazing at Olympe in a way to demonstrate to her that she was necessary to him beyond everything else.

"Happiness is the end which man ought to seek here on earth?"

"And we have found it!" Bannière would cry.

"Very well, then, so long as we are happy, what are you worrying about, my friend?"

"Ah! I am worrying about the duration of our happiness."

"You do wrong, then; you admit that you are happy, — and that is a thing which human beings rarely admit, — thank Providence for it, and ask nothing more."

"You are my Providence!" Bannière would whisper.

He was an apt scholar, with abundant inclination to learn; and in the course of a week he had mastered Olympe's whole system of philosophy, — had mastered it so thoroughly that at the end of the week she had nothing more to teach him, whereas he began, in his turn, to lay a hand upon the money, and to spend it as freely and with as keen an eye to the necessities of life as his mistress.

In Bannière's eyes (we must give him due credit), the great necessity of life was the adoration of his love, — absolute, idealized, noble.

At first he wanted to cover Olympe with jewelry and ornaments. She reminded him that her jewels were as beautiful as those of any woman on earth. Nevertheless Bannière persisted, until she threatened to buy for him twice as much as he bought for her.

"Very well," said Bannière, "no more buying. I like jewels, but only for you. If I had jewels, I would like to have them from you. Give me only that ring which you have on your finger."

"Which ring?" asked Olympe.

"That one," said Bannière, pointing to the ring which Monsieur de Mailly had left with the two thousand louis, and which Bannière, in all the hurry of the flight, had seen glistening on the chimney-piece.

It was a superb ruby, surrounded with diamonds.

Bannière pointed to it in a dogged way which indicated something more than the mere wish for the ring as

such. His hand was already held out to receive it, for Olympe had never refused him anything. Surely she would not refuse the ring; for what was the paltry ruby which Bannière desired to her?

It must be said that during the month they had been together not the shadow of a cloud had passed across the pure azure of their heaven.

Bannière was much surprised, therefore, when he saw Olympe's eyes seek his at this request, and she asked, —

"Why do you want that ring, my friend?"

Bannière was so unprepared for the question that it disconcerted him.

"Why, because —" he stammered.

"That 's no reason," said Olympe, with a smile.

Bannière smiled back at her, and replied, —

"I think it 's the best reason I can give you, dear Olympe."

"Do you want a ring?"

"I should like one, but it must be like that."

"Very well! this ring is worth about a hundred louis; take a hundred louis, my friend, and go and buy one like it."

"*Mon Dieu!*" he exclaimed, "that ring is very precious to you, is n't it? It 's easy to see that it came from Monsieur de Mailly!"

He pronounced the last words with an angry intonation, and awaited the result.

But she said very coolly, —

"To be sure, it came from Monsieur de Mailly. What then?"

"Why, then I can understand that you will not give it to me; but I cannot understand why you wear it on your finger which so often touches mine."

"As to that, my friend, you are perfectly right," said Olympe.

She drew the ring from her finger, and put it away under the false bottom of the box in which she kept her jewels.

Bannière saw the ring disappear, and immediately began to regret that he had provoked so uncomfortable a scene between himself and his mistress, and a scene which was decidedly lacking in tact, since it awakened the hardly vanished memories of her earlier passion.

She sulked, and he sulked. Bannière's situation was absurd; so he took his hat and his sword, and went out for a turn on the quays in the fresh evening air.

As for Olympe she undressed and went to bed, after locking her door and stationing Claire before it as sentinel. Claire had been informed by Père Philémon, at Olympe's request, of her mistress's new domicile, and had succeeded in reaching Lyons in peasant costume without arousing the suspicions of the Jesuits.

When Bannière returned, he had invested in a huge emerald which cost one hundred and twenty louis; his reflections had driven him to that, for the lovesick wretch was for the moment in quest of a ring, and wished to make Olympe forget her ruby.

At the same time he wished to make her forget, and above all to forget himself, some words she had said upon Père Philémon's bench, — words of unfathomable depth, in whose mysterious darkness his restless love could see only ominous meaning.

"If, when you are more knowing," Olympe had said, "you are not even a better fellow than you are to-day, I shall be very much mistaken; it will be my own fault, and I shall have to pay for it."

Since those words were spoken, Bannière had become

deeply versed in the science of life; had he become a better fellow? He feared greatly that Olympe's conscience or her keen insight would reply in the negative.

"I am a poor wretch, then," he told himself, "I am a vulgar fellow, and am deserving of her in appearance only; she is deceived in me, and it may well be that after she has gone on for some time believing me to be of pure gold, she will recognize me some day as being as false as a counterfeit coin, or a piece of jewelry of base metal. When that day comes, she certainly will cease to love me."

He had therefore bought the emerald to prove to Olympe that he had a good disposition, and would be the first to seek a reconciliation.

But, as we have said, Claire was on guard. Bannière found her on the threshold; and she forbade his entering, because her mistress was asleep.

At once furious and ashamed, and almost in despair, Bannière shut himself up in his own room, where he passed half the night writing letters and tearing them up.

At last, worn out with fatigue, we had almost said with remorse, he went to sleep, with his elbows on the table and his head resting on his hands, while his unsnuffed candle trickled down the sides of the candlestick.

About two o'clock Olympe crept into his room, saw the torn letters, the guttering candle, and the sleeping Bannière.

She gazed at him a moment, graceful as a shadow in her white peignoir; she stooped over him, breathed a kiss upon his brow, which was furrowed even in his sleep, and without waking him sat down beside him in an easy-chair.

It happened that the sleeper, waking at daybreak shivering with cold, chilled to the bone, generally miserable and cursing his unhappy fate, stumbled against the easy-chair in which he proposed to finish his night's sleep, and saw the smiling face of Olympe.

Straightway he fell at her knees, weeping bitterly and beating his breast as he cried,—

"Oh, yes, she is better, a hundred times better, than I!"

Olympe accepted the emerald, and wore it for a while upon her finger; then she said to Bannière,—

"Your little finger is just the size of my third finger; I give you this emerald, and do you wear it for love of me."

Bannière forthwith strutted like a peacock, and proceeded to dazzle all the females who took the air on the grand Mall.

The next day after the nocturnal incident we have described, Olympe noticed that Bannière was very deeply preoccupied.

"What 's the matter?" she asked.

Bannière looked up at her timidly.

"You have something to ask me," said Olympe.

"Yes," he replied, "I want to ask you if you will be my wife."

Olympe smiled; but the smile vanished at once, and her face assumed an expression of the utmost seriousness.

"You are a dear fellow, Bannière," said she, "and I do not for a moment doubt that it is with the firm purpose to make a happy woman of me that you ask me to marry you; but, fortunately or unfortunately, what you ask is impossible."

"Why so?" asked Bannière.

"If the lover was jealous of Monsieur de Mailly's

ring," said Olympe, "the husband might be jealous of something different."

"Olympe," cried Bannière, "I swear—"

"No oaths, my friend," said Olympe. Putting her hand over his mouth, she added,—

"Let us remain as we are; we are well enough so."

Bannière would have replied; but Olympe raised her finger with a smile, and everything was said. The question of marriage was not raised between them again.

What a fascinating life is that of lovers who are real lovers! How well they can do without any third person; how skilfully they brush aside all the dust and dried leaves and insects which threaten to fall into the nectar of their happiness!

During the first six months of their residence at Lyons Bannière and Olympe did not see a single strange face in their house. It is true that they had some reluctance to be seen, lest they might be recognized; but their principal reason for hiding themselves, if the fact were known, was their wish to be alone.

And then, too, Olympe had endless expedients which aroused Bannière's enthusiastic admiration; she conceived the idea of having musicians play symphonies in her antechamber during the hot weather, while she and Bannière remained invisible.

She loved riding, and to make little excursions of two or three days' duration in the neighborhood, in a comfortable carriage well stocked with provisions and cushions.

She loved whatever amused Bannière; and everything that she proposed amused him.

After six months of schemes for enjoyment each more ingenious than the last, our lovers, while seeking one day for a new one in the common purse, discovered that their store was reduced to a hundred and fifty louis.

That was barely enough to maintain the gait of the last six months for one month more.

Bannière looked at Olympe, and Olympe looked at Bannière; the latter, weighing the gold in his hand, remarked, —

"One hundred and fifty louis make three thousand six hundred livres."

"I was just making the same calculation," said Olympe, smiling.

"That is what many happy, yes, very happy people spend in a year. We have had, therefore, in our six months of happiness six years of such happiness as they have."

"Very true," said Olympe.

"But we have only one month of the same happiness left," continued Bannière.

"That might be so," said Olympe, "for lazy folk, but not for people who work!"

"Who work!" exclaimed Bannière, with surprise. "Do you propose to work, pray?"

"Indeed I do."

"At what, *mon Dieu?*"

"At my profession. Am I not an actress? Are you not an actor? Are there not two theatres at Lyons? Are there not a hundred theatres in France, if the two at Lyons want none of us? Finally, have n't we an income of twelve thousand livres ready to our hands in the parts of King Hérode and Queen Mariamne?"

"Death of my life! You are an enchantress!" cried Bannière, delirious with joy; "and everything you touch changes to gold."

"Then, too," added Olympe, "life is beginning to be a little stale; we are growing fat."

"That is true, upon my word!"

"Think of it! — travelling from city to city, changing one's residence continually, the applause, the study, the fascination of the art, the excitement — "

"You electrify me, Olympe! "

"And here we are economizing; idleness is ruining us; we lose all that we spend and all that we do not earn."

"Yes, we do indeed! "

"To-morrow morning, Bannière, go and find the manager of the theatre and bring him to me."

"I will, my dear."

"And meanwhile let us have a good time this evening, — a concert on the water all to ourselves, and — "

"And our love," cried Bannière. "Oh, how rich we are! "

XIX.

LIFE IN THE PROVINCES.

The manager of the theatre came on the next day but one to call upon Olympe, whom Bannière had pointed out to him upon the promenade.

Our readers must not picture to themselves the manager of the period which we are trying to describe, as the autocrat with whom we of the present day are familiar, having his seraglio, his police, and his bullies.

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to be the manager of a theatre was to be the constitutional arbiter of the destinies of an enterprise maintained by the combined talent of a dozen or more wandering artists, sometimes including a poet who was attached to the society.

A manager was then purely and simply the leading actor of his theatre, — so far as his responsibility was concerned.

Bannière had seen enough of actors; he had heard enough from Olympe, and had a sufficient store of natural cleverness and Bohemian instinct, to know what line to adopt in this great enterprise of alluring a theatrical manager.

He was careful not to tell him that Olympe was an actress who had already made her mark. He represented her as a girl of good family, who was stage-struck and ready to drop, head downward, into the managerial snare.

He did not lay stress upon Olympe's personal beauty and distinguished mien; he simply took him to the promenade, as we have said, and pointed Olympe out to him.

The manager saw her, was presented to her, saluted her, made an appointment, and made his appearance promptly at the hour named, — a sign of interest which very properly seemed of good augury to our lovers.

The manager, well used to such stories as Bannière had told him, believed as much of it as he chose; but when he was ushered into the sumptuous establishment of the two young people, when he was buried in the luxurious easy-chair they offered him, when he found himself amid flowers and the sweet perfumes of a boudoir, when from the boudoir he passed to the dining-room to refresh his inner man, when he perceived the silver plate and the crystal, when he had tasted the exquisite wines and toothsome sweetmeats, — he was so astounded that he made up his mind at once that the would-be débutante had not an idea about acting.

So he conceived the scheme of taking his fill of the pleasant odors, cheering himself up with the good wine, in short, enjoying a good hour of material felicity, and after the interview thanking with all his heart the generous hosts who were mad enough to dream of treading the boards when they had such soft carpets.

But Bannière and Olympe were as shrewd as he; they allowed him to indulge in such fancies as he chose, and then at dessert, when he was in comfortable trim, they begged him to listen to a specimen of the science of the new aspirants to dramatic renown.

The actor, at that proposal, bridled up, emptied his glass, and prepared for the conflict with a contemptuous smile.

Olympe saw the smile, interpreted the contempt, and patiently bided her time, sure of victory.

"Well, I will give you the cue," said the artist, in a sonorous voice. "What do you know?"

"What do *you* know?" asked Bannière.

"I! Oh, I know everything; I play the leading rôles. Select your best piece, and let 's see what you can do."

"Do you know 'Hérode et Mariamne'?" Olympe asked him in her mildest tones.

"Parbleu!" ejaculated the half-tipsy actor.

"Well," said Olympe, "begin where you choose."

"And I will prompt," said Bannière.

"Have you the prompt-book?" asked the manager.

"Oh! I don't need it; I know the whole play by heart."

"Very good," said the guest; "I will play Hérode."

"My part," interjected Bannière, with a smile.

The actor seemed in no wise disturbed at Bannière's announcement, and thundered out his lines in a hoarse voice.

Olympe replied.

But she had not recited ten lines before the old fellow began to open his ears.

"Oho!" he exclaimed.

"What is it?" asked Olympe, modestly; "have I made a mistake?"

"No, no, quite the reverse; keep on."

The manager leaned his elbows on the table, and fixed his eyes, glowing like coals, upon Mariamne, who resumed the thread of her part.

"Aha!" said he, "you have acted before now, have n't you?"

"Occasionally, yes," replied Olympe.

"Where?"

"Oh! here and there," Bannière answered for her, to avoid the necessity of lying.

"But do you know that you are simply superb, Mademoiselle?" shouted the drunken old fellow, with the deepest admiration; "upon my soul! you remind me of La Champmeslé!"

"Did you ever act with her?" asked Olympe, with a smile.

"Oh, I was employed at the theatre," said the manager.

"And you, Monsieur?" he resumed, addressing Bannière.

"You wish to hear me?"

"Yes."

"That 's no more than fair."

With a deep voice and the terrifying wealth of gesticulation which characterized the old school, Bannière began the lines which accompany the *entrée* of Hérode.

The old actor listened in uncompromising silence; when he had concluded, he said, lengthening his lip, —

"Monsieur is not bad, but he still has much to learn."

"I will learn then," said Bannière.

"And to study."

"I will study."

"Not bad?" interrupted Olympe, coming to the rescue of her friend's self-conceit. "Come, come, my good friend, it 's easy to see that you play the same parts."

"Besides," added Bannière, a little piqued, "we were only speaking about Madame, I think."

"You are mistaken, my dear," said Olympe, quickly; "on the contrary, we are speaking about both of us. He who has me will have you, or else he will not get me."

"Ah!" said the manager, "that complicates matters."

"Do you mean it?" asked Olympe.

"Yes, I must consult my associates. If only Madame were concerned, I would come to terms on my own responsibility, for our leading lady, La Catalane, is not strong enough; but as to Monsieur's line of parts, — the devil! that 's a different matter."

"Is it your line?" asked Bannière.

"Call it our line," said the old fox.

"Well, what about your line?" Bannière persisted.

"Our line is already divided among three, and I must consult with the others."

"Listen!" said Olympe, who knew actors well from her long experience with them; "our bottles are empty, it is true, but the wine-cellar is not far away. Go and find those of your associates whose consent is indispensable; bring them here, for we can come to a better and more speedy understanding all together than separately. Besides, it is dinner-time, — we will dine together."

Bannière seized the occasion to open a screened door, through which floated treacherously such a delicious odor of roast meat, such a savory hint of *volaille farcie*, that the actor, his hesitation at an end, left the house, inhaling deep draughts of the seductive emanations from the kitchen, through nostrils whose abnormal dilatation plainly signified, "I will return."

And he did return, flanked by four leading members of his troupe, — three men and a woman.

The three men were pale, threadbare, and out at elbows; as old as their costumes: they were the financier, the noble father, and the first servant.

The woman was of Olympe's size, but less distinguished-looking, and with these further differences, that Olympe's eyes were blue, and hers black; Olympe was a blonde, and she a brunette; Olympe's complexion was fair and rosy, hers a dull brown; in every respect she was of the

true Catalan type, to which fact, doubtless, she owed her name, La Catalane. In addition she had lovely hands and a figure which was excelled in grace by none but Olympe's.

Olympe received them all as comrades, put them at their ease with a word, seated them at table, and joined without the least ceremony, in the theatrical slang which was so foreign to her refined taste.

She asked the name and line of each one, smiling even more sweetly when she addressed the solitary female than when she addressed the men.

"La Catalane," she replied, showing a double row of little white teeth.

Olympe recommended La Catalane to the attention of Bannière.

The dinner was of the liveliest; everybody got a little tipsy except Olympe, who as she stooped to pick up her napkin at dessert saw one of La Catalane's tiny feet upon Bannière's foot, while with the other she was tapping that of her neighbor on the other side. Olympe blushed. She felt something like a serpent's tooth at her heart. But as she rose and glanced at innocent Bannière, she knew by his calm face that he was unconscious of his good fortune. She contented herself with holding out her hand to him; and Bannière rose with the greatest eagerness, and hastened to imprint a kiss upon it.

Under the influence of the good dinner, they recited verses and acted scenes of all sorts. At last Bannière brought pen, ink, and paper, and Olympe drew up a contract which the five associates signed.

She stipulated for a fixed salary of twelve hundred livres for herself, and an eighth of the profits for herself and Bannière. Her modest demands enchanted the whole party, and they separated most affectionately.

Olympe noticed that La Catalane kissed Bannière five times, while Bannière counted ten kisses bestowed by the actors upon Olympe.

When they had all gone, "You see, dearest," said she, without referring to the quintuple caress, but confining herself to the success of their project, — "you see that we are almost sure of six thousand livres a year."

"Yes; but they were too lavish with their kisses," retorted Bannière.

A last word which abundantly satisfied Olympe that she would do very wrong to harbor any malice against La Catalane.

From that moment Olympe thought only of her rôle and her début, which had been fixed for the following Thursday by the council of six.

XX.

IN WHICH A NEW CHARACTER APPEARS UPON THE HORIZON.

Prosperity, unfortunately, is one of those goddesses of uncertain temper and inconstant character, whose wings no mortal can flatter himself that he is able to bind, — a difficult operation, which no conqueror, except Cæsar, has ever succeeded in accomplishing with the Goddess of Victory.

Now it came to pass that Olympe made her début;

That she made a very successful début in a piece by an unknown author;

That there was a good deal of talk about her début, and that the talk brought crowds to the theatre;

That the coming of the crowds made the receipts very large.

It came to pass, in short, that Monsieur and Madame de Bannière as they were called, produced a very favorable impression upon the people of Lyons.

Hence they became famous, while formerly they had only been happy.

But their celebrity naturally led them to spend much more money than they had spent formerly.

They had to hold receptions, and to make some display, whereas up to that time their life had been absolutely secluded.

The end of the louis came at last. The receipts were very slow of passage from the purse of the partners into

that of Monsieur and Madame de Bannière. At the end of every month there was interminable wrangling. To judge from the remarks of the associates, the engagement of Olympe and Bannière was a burden to the company.

Aside from these little difficulties, things went along after a fashion. At the end of every month Bannière solved the trouble by showing his teeth; and the men paid because those teeth were so solidly set, and the women because they were so white.

But it happened about this time that the king fell sick, that his illness made a deep impression throughout France, and that all forms of entertainment were arrested by the news; and the theatres being the places of entertainment *par excellence*, they became more and more deserted in proportion as the churches filled up.

Matters went on thus for two or three months, and then, after an agonizing death-struggle, the troupe became insolvent.

The contract of association was rendered null and void.

Then, when the theatres had recovered a little vitality with the king's convalescence, the partners, once more masters of the situation, dictated terms to Olympe and Bannière to which they had to submit.

The doors were opened once more.

Olympe had become habituated to the life again, and went back to the theatre with that ardor which real artists bring to their work. Bannière, too, had nibbled at the delights of applause, and, unsatisfying as that food was compared with the juicy roasts which had courted the manager's sense of smell, on the day of his first call upon Olympe, he devoured it. Rather than not play at all, they played for the wretchedly small salaries which the association, a free corporation, accorded, in its

strict impartiality, to the artist who stood above the line, and the common strolling player, in equal portion.

Pecuniary embarrassment, with veiled face and uncertain step, crept into the establishment of Bannière.

Bannière perceived the privations which Olympe inflicted upon herself; accustomed as she was to living in luxury, narrow circumstances were a real hardship for her. He saw black rings gather around her eyes, her lips grow pale, and her hands fall listlessly at her sides.

As Olympe had predicted, Bannière had lived quickly, so to speak, and learned a great deal in a short time. In a year he had lived a whole lifetime. He knew the exact weight of joy in the heart, and he knew too how many joys a single sorrow can cause to wither.

Then from time to time jealousy bit savagely at Bannière's heart,— jealousy utterly without cause; but every one knows that the most terrible jealousies are those which have no reason for being.

This happened when Olympe was reaping a harvest of bravos and smiles upon the stage. He sometimes would be standing in the wings, and he would count the exquisites who were crowding around the fair creature.

And he would shudder to think that among all those red-coats he might encounter another Monsieur de Mailly, with his rouleaux of gold, his servants, his houses, his horses, and his love, at every turn.

If such a mishap ever should befall, what would become of him, Bannière, a mere puffed-up atom, magnified to the statue of a giant by that microscope of the soul which is called love?

Many times, while the adorable and adored creature was bowing her thanks for the flowers and shouts of applause, Bannière would ask himself how all those fine fellows who were parading about her came to be richer than he.

He remembered that he had read somewhere that maxim which is none the less alluring for being all wrong, —

"Those whom Providence forgets have the right to try chance; he who has not God on his side is a great fool not to make friends with the devil."

He remembered a complete system of philosophy which he had thought out in the gloomy days of the novitiate, a complete theory of free-will which he had thought out in the cloudy days of his theatrical experience.

He said to himself that so long as a man could dispose of his own skin, that man was as good as another; that the skin was as good a stake as anything else; that, given a louis, a man might risk the loss of that louis, with the right to pay with his skin a second louis which he has not, in order to win back the first louis which he no longer has.

So Bannière took the only louis which was left in his house, and went off to risk it at the gaming-table. He won, as fresh hands always do win. One of the axioms which Bannière was ignorant of, perhaps because it was true, was that the devil has no snares set except for novices in sin.

With his louis Bannière won fifty louis, which he carried away in triumph; and Olympe, marvelling greatly, found them, on her return from the theatre, in the drawer of her chiffonnier in place of the single louis she had left there, and which she did not expect to find, having told Claire to take it to pay expenses for the next two days.

We can understand how such a beginning drew Bannière on. And yet while the fifty louis lasted, and he had no absolute need to play, he abstained. True it is, that although he kept away from the gambling-house, the ne ran incessantly in his head. On the stage he heard

the clink of the gold, and would get confused or neglect his cue. Two passions cannot exist on good terms in a man's heart; one must consume the other in time. The passion for play consumed the passion for acting; Bannière was hissed, and went to the gaming-table for consolation.

In three months Bannière had become a regular stand-by and pillar of the gambling-house.

Olympe meanwhile continued to work for her associates; she worked for the valets, she worked for the financiers, she worked for the noble fathers, who bought wine and fuel with the price of her labor. She worked for La Catalane, who, thanks to Olympe, received over and above her earnings outside the theatre two hundred livres a month, upon which she dressed herself handsomely.

Olympe's toilet, on the other hand, suffered correspondingly. What was luxury for La Catalane was next door to poverty for Mademoiselle de Clèves. They still continued to maintain some outward show of prosperity, but real plenty had disappeared from the household. Olympe said to herself, with perfect truth, that solitude was the crowning point of wretchedness; and she kept the house full of people, so that their chatter might drive care away.

She invited people to the house because she saw that Bannière was being drawn away from her, because she felt lonely, and she knew that to invite people to her house was the surest way to recall him.

She hoped that Bannière would be jealous, and that the gambler, having won the battle with the actor, would in turn succumb to the lover.

It was a hard fight, and victory was uncertain. Bannière had become a gambler by profession; he brought

to the exercise of the trade all the skill which a man of intelligence devotes to the success of what he undertakes; he did not win more than another might have done, to be sure, but he lost less.

Olympe also had been jealous. Perhaps, she had thought, this gambling was only a pretext to cover up some love-affair. So she had summoned Mademoiselle Claire, and told her to bring the male costume in which she had fled with Bannière. She had sadly put it on once more, and followed her lover, almost ashamed of what she was doing.

It was really to the gaming-table that he went. Olympe hesitated a moment about following any farther; then she made up her mind, and darted behind him into that hell on earth.

When, after watching for half an hour, hidden in a window-recess, she had seen what gambling was, she made her escape, with pale cheeks and anxious heart.

So it was that when Bannière returned, instead of receiving him coldly as she had done of late, she took his hand, sat at his feet, and said to him in a tone as endearing as a lover's, and as fondly persuasive as a mother's, —

"You have been gambling, dear."

"*Mon Dieu!* yes," said Bannière.

"And you have lost?"

"No!" he cried.

"But you have not won?"

"Oh, I ought to have won a thousand louis."

And he explained to her, with the feverish enthusiasm of the gambler, all the grand coups he should have won if luck had not been against him.

"Poor boy!" said Olympe, after listening to him attentively, and with the deepest pity; "such a world of emotion and calculation and struggling and suffering!"

Olympe was always the same, — kind, loving Olympe; the tears came to his eyes.

"Go on," said he.

"Oh, *mon Dieu!*" said Olympe, "the conclusion is very easily reached. "You say that you neither win nor lose; so it 's just as well not to play at all. Come, is it agreed? Don't go there and get your blood so heated; you will at least be economizing your vital force."

Bannière was about to cry, "It is for you;" but he checked himself.

He was still in love; so he was still generous and thoughtful.

Olympe went on: "We are not yet at the end of our resources; we still have jewels which we can sell."

"Oh," cried Bannière, "before the jewels, I should say the plate had better go."

"The plate? Oh, no!" said Olympe. "I can very well dress and go about without jewels; but without plate we can no longer receive."

"What! whom do you want to receive, in God's name?" said Bannière, who, as he was seldom at home, returning only when everybody had gone, did not know that Olympe received.

"I have a plan of my own," said Olympe. "You will not remain a gambler any longer than you remained an actor. Variety is a necessity for you. From a novice you became an actor; from an actor a gambler; from a gambler you will turn into a man of the world, a man of the sword perhaps, — how can I tell? And so you will continue until you have accomplished the last transformation of all, and become a magnificent butterfly."

"Alas!" rejoined Bannière, "up to this time, poor

Olympe, I have scarcely been more than a caterpillar beside you."

"My dear boy," said Olympe, "you have intelligence, education, and good manners; you are an eminent logician; you speak well —"

"What possible good will all that do me, if I have no one to give me a lift?"

"That 's just it, my dear Joseph; some one will give you a lift."

"Who, for instance, might that some one be?"

"The Abbé d'Hoirac."

"The Abbé d'Hoirac?"

"Don't you know whom I mean?"

"No, upon my word, unless it 's that hedge-priest who was always prowling about the wings on nights when you played, and was forever treading on my feet."

"That 's the very man."

"What! that little wretch who is always fluttering about, humming and singing like a crazy cockchafer?"

"Indeed, that 's a very good description of him," said Olympe, laughing heartily.

"Do you mean to say that I must seek the patronage of that half-fledged creature?"

"Ah, now you are unjust, Bannière; a goose, I grant you, but not half-fledged. Take him for all in all, the abbé is a fascinating little dandy, and it is plain that you have not noticed him carefully."

"But one would say that you had taken a good deal of notice of him, to make up for my neglect," retorted Bannière, who hardly knew how to take Olympe's pertinacity.

"What! more nonsense!" said Olympe.

"How in the deuce do you know him?"

"In the same way that I know quantities of people

whom you do not know. Every evening you go off to your game, and every evening the Abbé d'Hoirac comes to pass an hour or two at chess with me."

Bannière shook his head gloomily.

"You have convinced me," said he, "of the futility of my attempts to make our fortune at the gaming-table. To-morrow I will play chess with the Abbé d'Hoirac."

"And at that game, my dear, you will win instead of losing; I will answer for that."

"Is this Abbé d'Hoirac such a perfect creature, pray?" said Bannière, somewhat piqued.

"He is not perfect, my dear fellow, for there is no perfection in this world. But since I am reduced to the company of Claire and my hairdresser on days when I do not act, the society of this crazy cockchafer, as you call him, has not seemed to me a thing to be altogether despised."

"It is curious," said Bannière, "that I have never detected the striking merit of Monsieur l'Abbé d'Hoirac. To be sure, I have not paid much attention to him except when he has trodden upon my feet."

"You persist in harping upon the abbé's awkwardness, my friend; however, it is very natural. The abbé is near-sighted, so much so that he can't see the end of his nose. How can you expect him to see his feet, which are much farther from his eyes than the end of his nose is?"

"You are right, Olympe," said Bannière; "and the first time I meet the Abbé d'Hoirac I will look him in the eye."

"Very well, you will see a very pretty doll," said Olympe, coolly, passing into her dressing-room.

"When will Monsieur l'Abbé be here again? This evening?"

"No, I act this evening."
"To-morrow, then?"
"Yes, to-morrow."
"At what time?"
"At six o'clock, as usual."
"Very well, Madame."

Olympe looked askance at her lover, shrugged her shoulders, and put herself in the hands of her maid.

XXI.

THE ABBÉ D'HOIRAC.

THE evening arrived, and with the evening Madame de Bannière's usual guests.

Bannière did not go, as his custom was, to the gambling-hell. He proposed to make the acquaintance of this Abbé d'Hoirac, of whom he had heard so much.

He saw him come in as the clock struck six; it was his regular hour.

This delightful creature caused his presence to be announced, in the first place by two servants, and then by a delicious odor of musk, which ascended to the first floor as soon as he put his foot on the first stair.

Behind the abbé came two more imposing lackeys, bearing an enormous salver, laden with flowers, rolls of music, and confections.

The abbé made his *entrée* very gracefully; he walked, to be sure, with his arms stretched out in front of him as if he were playing blind man's buff, but this uncertainty of gait was not without a certain charm.

He had an attractive face, plump and rosy, great eyes fringed with long lashes; the eyes lacked brilliancy, but the incessant activity of the pupils gave to the eyeball all the play of color and transparency which the movement of the fingers gives to a dull opal.

The abbé closed his eyes and opened his lips, hid his eyeballs and showed his teeth; he knew how to smile very cleverly, so as to give a roguish expression to his turned-up nose, which would have been simply ugly in a

gentleman of less polished manners or of less illustrious family than he.

Faithful to his custom, he saluted Olympe by kissing her hand, as a hand was kissed in those days at Versailles; and still adhering to custom, he proceeded to tread with both feet upon both Bannière's feet, — that gentleman being near at hand, engaged in surveying him.

"Monsieur de Bannière, the master of the house," said Olympe, hastening to present the ex-novice to the abbé, in order to cut short the bad humor of the one, and assist the bad sight of the other.

"Ah, Monsieur, a thousand pardons!" cried the abbé; "I am a most unfortunate man."

"I assure you, Monsieur, that you did n't hurt me at all," said Bannière.

"Oh, no, Monsieur, no; it was not, by any means, for my involuntary awkwardness that I begged your pardon!"

"For what was it then, please, Monsieur?" said Bannière, surprised and hardly daring to wipe his buckles.

"Why, Monsieur, it was because I did not know I was to have the honor of seeing you, and so took the liberty of offering Madame de Bannière a few flowers and sweetmeats."

"Lovely flowers they are, and the sweetmeats could not be better," said Bannière.

"It may be so, but such as it is not proper that another than you should offer Madame," cried the abbé.

"Monsieur —"

"That is why, with your leave, my two servants will at once throw them all into the street."

"Oh, Monsieur!" exclaimed Bannière, "that would be downright wicked."

"Throw them out, throw them out!" said the abbé.

The lackeys did as they were told, and actually emptied the salver, laden with the offerings of their master, out of the window.

Bannière marvelled much at this performance, the magnificence of which humiliated him.

Olympe simply smiled. She had followed the flowers with her eye as they were launched into space, and had seen a paper fall out of one of the nosegays.

Bannière made several obeisances to this abbé who was so polite and so pompous at once, whose cue it was to be forever speaking and forever smiling. He sang duets with Olympe, he sang solos, he played on a violin which his servant had brought; in short, he furnished the entertainment of the evening, with assiduous courtesy to Bannière, by which the latter was much embarrassed.

As for Olympe, she yawned very frequently during the evening. Frequently, too, she gave her hand to the "master of the house" to kiss; in a word, she reassured Bannière as a worthy, honest woman can reassure her lover.

It may be that she was more successful in that direction than was advisable; for there are certain hearts whose fidelity depends always upon the state of fear or subjection in which they are held.

When the abbé had fluttered about the salon for three hours, and had broken the strings of his violin and his voice, he remarked, —

"Really, Madame, I must introduce you to a very worthy man."

He began to laugh.

"Of what man are you speaking?" asked Olympe.

"You, especially, must know him, Monsieur de Bannière," continued the abbé, still laughing.

"Who is the man?" asked Bannière, in his turn.

"Are you very devout, Monsieur de Bannière?" asked the abbé.

"I?"

"Yes; are you very scrupulous?"

"Why,—moderately so. Why do you ask such a question?"

"The worthy man I spoke of—"

"He whose acquaintance you wish us to make?"

"Yes—is a Jew." Still the abbé laughed.

"What do you say, Abbé?" exclaimed Olympe. "A Jew! *Mon Dieu*, how can he serve us?"

"A Jew a worthy man!" said Bannière, with a smile a little forced. "You must be a very holy man, Monsieur l'Abbé, to have seen such a miracle."

"If you only could see the lovely pearl he sold me this evening, and for a mere nothing, really!"

"Ah! let us see it, Monsieur l'Abbé," said Olympe, with that childish eagerness which women always exhibit when jewels are in question.

"I no longer have it," said the abbé.

"What have you done with it?" asked Bannière; "can you tell before a lady?"

"*Mon Dieu!*" said the abbé, innocently. "I think that I fastened it to one of those bouquets, and it probably must be somewhere down there in the gutter."

The abbé said all this with the same charming smile.

"Monsieur l'Abbé is either a Gascon or a millionaire," was Olympe's comment.

"Both," replied the abbé, calmly. "I was saying that I would bring my Jew here some day; and if he does not find a way with that golden tongue of his to sell you ten thousand crowns' worth in an hour, I will discard my name d'Hoirac, Madame. He is a man without a rival."

"That pearl!" Bannière was thinking, "that pearl! There are men, then, who are wealthy enough to throw pearls out o' window in that fashion. Cleopatra at least drank hers."

He looked at the abbé's *retroussé* nose, this time with some admiration.

D'Hoirac spread his wings and took his leave about ten o'clock.

"You may perhaps think," said he to Olympe, "that I am leaving you very early to-day; but I promised La Catalane to take her to supper with Messieurs d'Abenas: they are two gentlemen from my part of the country who are recommended to me by their great kinsfolk, and whom I am launching in the world."

While he was speaking, Olympe was gazing contentedly at the impassive countenance of Bannière, who would have given a thousand drops of his blood if the chatterbox would only go, and give him an opportunity to hunt for the pearl.

But, alas! Madame's hairdresser had overheard what the abbé said.

This hairdresser — a sovereign, despotic oracle, who often worsted Claire in argument when the discussion turned on matters theatrical — was ordinarily admitted to all the councils; and when she was not admitted, she supplied the omission by listening at the doors.

It was enough for her, then, to hear what the abbé said; she knew that the street was deserted after six o'clock. If she were to seek, why should she not find?

Bannière saw her go out, although, like a person of theatrical training, she would have dissimulated her proceeding. He realized that, despite his prayers for the abbé's departure, it would come too late.

The reason for our opinion that the abbé postponed

his departure too long, is that, while Bannière was undressing that same evening, the hairdresser handed Olympe a letter which she said she had found in the street, and which was no other than the one Olympe had seen fly out of the bouquet.

It may be that Olympe would not have been put out with the letter (such an extraordinary organ is the female heart!) if the incident of the pearl had not spoiled it all.

While she was reading the letter in her dressing-room, Olympe heard Bannière stealthily open the door of his chamber.

She guessed that his purpose in opening it was to go downstairs, and that his purpose in going downstairs was to look for the pearl.

She conceived a bad opinion of him for that.

"Where are you going, my friend?" she asked, crumpling the letter into the pocket of her peignoir.

"I?" said Bannière. "Oh! nowhere. I was going out."

"Going out bareheaded as you are? What are you going out for?"

"To get a breath of air," said Bannière.

"Better stay in the house, then, my friend," said Olympe. "Really, if the abbé should see you in the street to-night, he might think you were looking for his pearl."

Bannière blushed as if his own conscience had reproached him from Olympe's mouth.

He returned to his chamber and went to bed, but slept very ill. All night long he tossed and turned in his bed. Poor Bannière! he was dreaming of pearls and diamonds.

The next day, however, Bannière sought out the abbé

upon the promenade, where he was to be met with every day.

After the customary salutations and a few aberrations of the abbé's feet upon those of Bannière, the latter asked,—

"Were you not with your Jew friend a moment ago?"

"No, indeed."

"Excuse me! I thought—"

"I was with the Sardinian ambassador."

"Ah! no one but myself would make such blunders. To think of mistaking an ambassador for a Jew!"

"Possibly you are in need of him?"

"Of the Sardinian ambassador?"

"No, of my Jew."

"Well, I may as well admit it, for I can hide nothing from you," said Bannière.

"Yes, the fact is that in spite of my near-sightedness, perhaps because of it, I am reasonably keen-witted. Do you happen to want the address of this Jew, dear Monsieur Bannière?"

"If you would kindly give it to me, you would do me a great favor."

"Jacob, Rue des Minimes, opposite the Golden Willow."

"The Golden Willow?"

"Yes, a great tree of gilded wood which projects from the shop of a—of a dealer in toys; yes, I remember the billiard-balls and snuff-boxes."

"Thanks!"

"Do you desire to buy something for Madame de Bannière?"

"Yes; but, hush!"

"Pardieu!" exclaimed the abbé.

Then a sudden thought came to him.

"Have you a chair?" said he.

"No; but I will hire one on the square."

"Take mine."

"Oh, Monsieur l'Abbé —"

"Pray take it, my dear fellow. Ho there, my bearers!"

Bannière allowed himself to be forced into the abbé's fine chair, and its owner gave a signal to the servants.

The husband safely boxed up, the abbé set out on the run to seek the wife who was rehearsing at the theatre.

As he turned a corner he experienced a violent shock which made him cry out with pain; but having recognized the man with whom he had collided, he uttered another cry of surprise.

"Jacob! you clown! why don't you look where you're going?"

"Pardon, Monsieur l'Abbé! I was much preoccupied myself; I was turning a corner, too, and had n't the honor to see you."

"What! you had n't the honor to see me?"

"No, Monsieur l'Abbé."

"And you know very well, you villain that I have the monopoly of blindness?"

"Monsieur l'Abbé will forgive me. I had no idea of getting in his way, but it was this chest which made me stoop."

"What is there in the chest, pray? Silverware, I will wager."

"Silverware, yes, Monsieur l'Abbé."

"Which you are going to sell?"

"No, which I have just bought, on the other hand."

"Go home quickly, you wretch! I have sent you a mer. Keep him there as long as you possibly can.

He is a friend of mine who is likely to buy as much as this chest will hold. Wait a moment! that's a very pretty chest, it seems to me."

"I think it is; just look at it. By changing the cipher, the chest would be the very thing for you, Monsieur l'Abbé."

He raised the chest to the level of the abbé's eyes.

"What is the cipher?" the abbé asked; "an O and a C?"

"Yes, it is doubtless the cipher of some adorer, who presented the chest to the actress."

"To the actress, do you say? Did you buy the chest of an actress?"

"Yes, Monsieur l'Abbé, of Madame de Bannière."

"Oh, Jacob, what's that you tell me? What! Madame de Bannière selling her silverware?"

"As you see, Monsieur l'Abbé!"

The abbé took the chest from the Jew's hands, and nearly let it fall, so heavy was it.

"How much did you pay for it?" he asked. "Now, don't lie."

"Two hundred pistoles, Monsieur l'Abbé."

"Villain! you stole half of it; there are four hundred pistoles' worth of silver in this chest. Send it to my house."

"Do you purchase it?"

"For three hundred pistoles."

"Three hundred pistoles will hardly do it, Monsieur l'Abbé; you yourself valued the chest at four hundred."

"Impudent scoundrel!" exclaimed the abbé. "I give you a hundred pistoles profit right in your hand, and you are not content!"

"Oh, the times are so hard!"

"Come, carry the chest to my house."

"I will do so, Monsieur l'Abbé;" and the Jew made a movement as if to take his leave.

"But first wait a moment."

"I am waiting, Monsieur l'Abbé;" and the Jew halted.

"Tell me how you made this lady's acquaintance."

"Through her hairdresser."

"Ah, so there's a hairdresser! I haven't seen her yet; to be sure, I don't see anything. Keep my friend a good long time. Off with you!"

He pursued his way towards the theatre, saying to himself, "Jew, hairdresser, husband, silverware sold, and jewelry bought; everything goes as if it were on casters."

XXII.

M. DE MAILLY'S RING.

BANNIÈRE had nothing to buy at the establishment of Jacob, the Jew; but he had much to sell there.

He sold all the jewels Olympe had given him, and all those that he had given her as well.

He sold them for five hundred louis, which he put in his pocket.

He had discovered a plan of play, sure to succeed, — a sort of alternating double or quits, which was infallible; but in order to work it to the best advantage he must have eight hundred louis at his disposal, and he had but five hundred.

With eight hundred louis he would have been perfectly sure of winning two millions. Reduced to twelve thousand livres, he sighed as he thought that he should win for his dear Olympe only a paltry eleven hundred thousand.

It was a small matter; but after all, small as it was, the sum of eleven hundred thousand livres would run the household nicely for a lustrum or two, without the assistance of abbé or hairdresser or theatrical partners.

That was the way they reckoned time before the invention of the metric system.

Bannière said to himself that, after all, eleven hundred thousand livres was a very pretty sum, and in gold would more than fill the hats of ten abbés, which are the largest of all hats.

When he had won that amount,— that being the least difficult part, since his calculations could not fail,— he would pack it on the back of a sturdy commissioner, two if need were, and would have the sacks carried to Olympe's boudoir; there he would cut them open in her absence, strew the carpet with the contents, and make her bathe her pretty feet up to the ankles in this cold bath with shining yellow waves.

There was a large gathering at the gambling house on that evening. Bannière took his seat distractedly in the first vacant chair; his bag of louis was at his hand.

He took a card, and began to prick out his plan. All his calculations made, he began to play.

His calculations were accurate apparently, for he won. Just as he was raking in twenty louis, an exclamation in a woman's voice attracted his attention. He looked up, and recognized La Catalane opposite to him, punting against him.

This woman laughed if she won, laughed if she lost,— laughed all the time, in fact.

She was exactly like the abbé, except that she laughed louder than he.

Bannière continued to win, and La Catalane to punt. Bannière had already won fifty thousand livres, and La Catalane had lost her last sou.

She borrowed ten louis from her neighbor, and proceeded to lose the ten louis with undiminished good spirits. Then she borrowed ten more louis and lost them, while Bannière kept on winning.

She changed her place in disgust, and came and rested her two plump little hands upon the shoulders of Bannière, who took no notice of her.

She shook him and teased him, and almost embraced

But Bannière was as cold as the yellow coins which the croupier kept sadly pushing over to him with his rake.

There came a coup upon which Bannière expected to win three hundred louis. He reckoned that the black would win, and staked upon the black.

Red turned up.

La Catalane laughed aloud.

Bannière looked up at her.

"You disturb me, my dear," he said, with some temper; "pray be careful."

The following coup he lost again.

That made six hundred louis at two strokes.

He doubled his stake, and lost upon a coup of which he felt absolutely certain.

Then he shook his shoulders to dislodge La Catalane's hands.

"Go to the devil!" he exclaimed; "you have brought me your bad luck."

The fair creature recoiled a step, in high dudgeon.

Twice more Bannière lost. It was an unparalleled run of ill-luck.

He had a hundred louis left, risked them all on one coup, and lost again.

"Lend me a louis," said he, pale as a ghost, to the actress.

"A louis?" said she; "why, if I had a louis left, I would play with it. It 's half an hour since I had a sou."

Bannière rose with pallid brow, face bathed in perspiration, and head in a whirl, and went out of the room to breathe.

His head was burning hot. He went home to Olympe, who sat waiting for him at the window.

From Bannière's way of repelling La Catalane, one

would have said he was passionately fond of Olympe. From his way of receiving Olympe's questions, one would have said he was in love with any other woman.

Observing his mood, Olympe asked him with her accustomed gentleness, —

"Are you thirsty, my dear?"

"Thirsty! why should I be?" shouted Bannière, like a madman. "Am I a drunkard, pray?"

"Gamblers are not generally drunkards," replied Olympe; "but they gamble, and in gambling their dispositions change, especially when they lose. You have been losing, haven't you?"

Bannière dropped into a chair, with his head in his hands.

"Oh, you know it very well!" said he.

Olympe made a sign to Claire, who left the room. As for the hairdresser, who was in the dressing-room, she kept perfectly still, so that her mistress forgot that she was there.

After the words which had been exchanged between the lovers, there was silence for a time.

This silence weighed upon Bannière, and yet he dared not break it.

He adopted a middle course; he rose and paced the floor.

"How much have you lost?" Olympe asked calmly.

"Sixty thousand livres!" said Bannière, grimly, reckoning in the sum he had won and calling it all loss.

"Oh! oh!" said Olympe; "where in heaven's name did you get sixty thousand livres to lose? and if you had them, why did you stake them, I should like to know? It is such a fine thing to have sixty thousand livres! I appreciate the value of it, I assure you, — I, who in my most prosperous days never had more than half of it."

"That 's right," cried Bannière, jumping at the pretext, "say hard things to me, reproach me with having impoverished you!"

"I did nothing of the kind, my friend; but if I should do it, I might not be altogether wrong, especially if the reproach would teach you better."

"Oh, well, Madame!" retorted Bannière, weeping with rage, "if you should be too unhappy, Monsieur l'Abbé d'Hoirac will console you; if you find yourself too poor, Monsieur l'Abbé d'Hoirac will heap riches upon you!"

Olympe coughed that little, dry cough which in a nervous person is commonly the symptom of extreme irritation restrained by the will alone.

"Why Monsieur l'Abbé d'Hoirac?" she asked.

"Because he was here this evening."

"By what do you see that?"

"I don't see it; I smell it in these odors which poison the air."

Bannière opened a window and a door.

"It is curious," said Olympe, laughing, "that you have a grudge against poor Abbé d'Hoirac because you have lost sixty thousand livres. And, apropos, you don't explain where you could have got so much money."

"Madame!" shrieked Bannière, "if ever the Abbé d'Hoirac puts his foot inside —"

"Threats, Monsieur?" said Olympe, with a majestic air which terrified Bannière.

She rose to her feet.

"My friend," said she, "you don't know what you are saying; your loss has entirely turned your brain."

"Madame!"

"Have you anything left to stake?"

"Oh, she believes it is the gambling!" he muttered; "she does not understand that I am jealous."

Olympe did not hear him.

"I see," said she, "you must have something to stake or to break. Must I let you break my heart? No, Bannière, I prefer to lose my last pearl rather than my last illusion. I would offer you my silver plate, but I sold it to-day to pay our half-yearly rent."

"Well, and then?" demanded Bannière.

"Then, I have Monsieur de Mailly's ring left. It is the last souvenir of a man who loved me dearly, adored me at times, and never wounded me. That ring I refused to give you; but I offer it to you to-day. Take it, pray, and give me peace of mind in return."

It will be remembered that the first jealous quarrel which had disturbed the happiness of the lovers concerned this same ring.

"No!" cried Bannière, stopping the young woman, as she was about to carry out the offer she had made; "no!"

"Yes, yes!" replied she.

"No, dear Olympe, no!" said Bannière, clinging to her; "no, I implore you! Do not look for that ring!"

"Why not?" Olympe insisted; "it is worth a hundred louis; you will stake them, and lose them, and then you will have the satisfaction of having lost sixty-two thousand four hundred livres like a blue ribbon."

As she spoke, she tore herself from Bannière's grasp and ran to her jewel-case, despite his pressing entreaties, his efforts to hold her back, and his broken words which she did not choose to hear.

Olympe had a strong will and physical strength; she threw the young man off a second time, and opened the box.

Bannière emitted a stifled cry.

Olympe, without noticing the cry any more than the rest, pressed upon the spring which held the false bottom in place, and the hiding-place was revealed.

It was empty.

Her surprise, her sudden pallor, the strange gleam which shot from her eyes and changed from rage to contempt before reaching Bannière, — these are details which neither painter nor poet can depict. Spectacles of that sort are seen once in a while, but never analyzed.

Olympe let the cover of the box fall, and her hand fell upon it.

Little by little her glance lost its fire; something seemed to die within her.

Bannière threw himself at her feet, which he seized and embraced, weeping bitterly the while.

"Forgive me, Olympe, forgive me!" he cried. "I took the ring as I took your other jewels and my own too. Besides, I always hated that ring; it made my life unbearable, for jealousy is harder to bear than poverty."

Olympe made no reply; like Dido, she kept her eyes fixed on the ground, and turned her head away.

"Oh, pity me!" said the poor wretch. "Do you believe that I took the ring to sell, and enjoy myself with the proceeds? No, I sold it for the sake of gambling. Why did I play? To win, — to win so as to enrich Olympe, my divinity, my life! I would have liked to win a crown to make you a queen, Olympe. I believed that I should win, because nothing seemed to me capable of resisting my love and the will founded upon it, — not even fatality. Oh, have pity on me! Chance is a statue with an iron pedestal against which the mad hopes of its worshippers hurl themselves and are beaten

back. Olympe, if you only knew! I had already won sixty thousand livres. I should have won five hundred thousand. In four hours I should have won a million. Oh, my dear life! if you had seen me just now, scarcely an hour since! I had in front of me a heap of gold and the vein of good luck, and I was going to make that heap into a mountain; it was so fine when it kept on growing, — growing all the time! Suddenly a breath passed between me and the fairy world in which I saw my fortune awaiting me. The door with the golden pillars disappeared; the treasure cave was hidden from my sight. I lost sight of the good spirit who was leading me, I no longer knew how to read my destiny; everything became black and sombre, as when the curtain falls after an exciting performance. Then I relapsed into the cold and shivering misery of the common mortal, — the mortal who fears and doubts; all my gold flew away, flake by flake, as a cloud dissolves in the sky, as snow melts away beneath the warm April sun. With every piece that abandoned me, I felt a hope, a joy, a blessing depart. When all was lost, I realized my wretchedness for the first time; for what I had really lost was not gold, nor hope, nor joy, nor happiness: I had lost you, Olympe! — you, yes, you! for it is plain to me now that I have lost you!"

At the sight of this suffering, which in its very exaltation found such profoundly eloquent expression, at the sight of this despair writhing at her feet, Olympe raised her head, and opened her heart to generous forgetfulness.

She was convinced that the man who had committed that base deed was guilty of nothing but love.

Always noble, always above petty motives and calculations, Olympe took Bannière's hands, pressed them to her heart, and embraced him most affectionately.

At this symptom of returning tenderness, the hair-dresser violently slammed the door of the dressing-room and went out without disguising her ill-humor; but it made no impression on either of the two young people, who had just found one more bright page in the fast-darkening volume of their love.

XXIII.

THE PAGE IS TURNED DOWN.

But everything has an end, even the good which evil brings forth. Within a fortnight Olympe discovered that her lover loved her more than ever; but she discovered at the same time that Bannière was a more inveterate gambler than he had ever been.

To use a distinctively modern expression, which we employ because it expresses our meaning so exactly, Bannière had become impossible.

No more theatre, no more quiet talks at home. Bannière was either dreaming or sighing when he was not at the gaming table, or imploring with clasped hands the pardon of his beloved for some new offence.

While he was thus working out his own destruction, the abbé, conscious of the superiority of his position, was every day throwing a stone into his rival's garden of beautiful dreams.

Olympe one evening found her silver plate in its usual place. She could not repress a joyful cry; for some days her philosophy had been unequal to the task of accustoming herself to do without it.

She called Claire to know who had brought the plate back during her sleep or her absence from home.

Claire did not know what she meant.

She then summoned the hairdresser.

The hairdresser insisted that the silver chest had never left the sideboard.

"Why, I sold it," cried Olympe, — "sold it to Jacob, the Jew."

"That cannot be, Madame," the woman replied; "Madame cannot have sold it, since it is where Madame always kept it."

"Jacob!" muttered Bannière, beneath his breath; "the man to whom I sold the jewels and the ring, the purchaser or dealer in ordinary of Monsieur l'Abbé d'Hoirac!"

A shudder and a suspicion invaded Bannière's heart at the same moment; but he put the curb on his imagination, which was all ready to run amuck, not wishing to yield at once to his bitter fancies.

"Olympe had some money hidden," he thought, "with which she has bought back the plate. Indeed, who knows that she really sold it? May she not have tried simply to make me think she was forced to that sacrifice? Women like to be pitied."

This sophistry sufficed, not to put his suspicions to sleep, but to abate them for a while.

That evening, as usual, the abbé came to take a hand at tric-trac, and to exercise his musical talent. He was extremely well received by both Monsieur and Madame de Bannière.

A marvellous fellow was this abbé for always having a new idea. Always restlessly craving novelty, without any great natural wit, he succeeded, by dint of searching, in picking up the wit which he had not.

Besides, he had a delightful way of doing everything; give him a simple promenade for a text, and he would conjure up halting-places for refreshments, games, dancers, performing-bears, merry-go-rounds, and fortune-tellers. He knew how fish should be dressed in every country on the globe; he had eighteen ways of cooking

eggs; he could scent out good wine and comfortable lodgings a league away. He did not give a flower, even, as any other man would give it; he seasoned it always with some gift which made the flower valuable; if he had lived in the time of Augustus, he would have invented bouquet-holders which the Roman ladies might have used for the flowers which Lucullus brought from Asia, whose sticky, corrosive juice stained their patrician hands yellow.

The abbé never entered a room that he did not bring with him some novelty or some new suggestion for the entertainment of the company.

On the evening in question he won a louis from Olympe, and said to her, —

"That makes it only one hundred and ninety-nine louis, Madame Bannière."

"What do you mean?" asked Olympe.

"Yes, what do you mean, Monsieur l'Abbé," echoed Bannière, "by the hundred and ninety-nine louis which remain?"

"I mean," rejoined the abbé, stumbling over Bannière's feet, as his custom was, "that if you keep the louis you have just lost, I shall have one hundred and ninety-nine more to bring you on Monday."

"What?" said Olympe, blushing.

"What?" said Bannière, turning white.

"Ah! to be sure, you do not know!" said the abbé.

"Do not know what?" asked both the young people, in the same breath.

"You do not know," continued the abbé, calmly, "that I have made an addition to your benefit performance for Sunday."

"How so?" asked Olympe, in amazement.

"In this way. Baron comes to Chalon this week. I had my secretary write to him, to urge him to extend his journey to Lyons, and play at your benefit."

"Well?" said Olympe.

"Well, he replied that he would very gladly act with you and for you, Madame."

"But all this does not explain how you will owe me just two hundred louis on Monday."

"Listen!"

Bannière's face became more serene; Olympe's alone retained its anxious expression.

"As soon as I had my reply from Baron," continued the abbé, "I made a little speculation."

"A speculation, you!" exclaimed Olympe. "Oh, you don't seem to me to have much of the appearance of a speculator."

"Nevertheless it is as I have the honor to tell you, Madame."

Olympe shook her head; but the abbé, being near-sighted, did not see the movement.

So he continued: —

"Judge whether I was far-sighted. I began by hiring the whole hall at a very low figure, for nobody knew what I proposed to do. At the first syllable which I allowed to escape me as to the extraordinary attractions of the performance, I had applications for three times as many boxes and stalls as the place contains. I multiplied the prices by three, — nothing but that; and the performance will bring in four hundred louis. As the idea of the benefit originated with me, you and I will divide it. It may be worthy of an Arab, a Turk, a Moor, a Jew, or a Genoese trader, I know all that; but understand that he who originates an idea deserves something for it. Now, I reckon that something at a half; and as the idea

was worth four hundred louis, there will be two hundred for me, and two hundred for you."

Olympe gazed admiringly and thoughtfully at him.

Bannière saw no hidden meaning in the words. He rubbed his hands and embraced the abbé.

"I will wager," said the latter, trampling upon Bannière's feet again, "I will wager — I *beg* your pardon, dear Monsieur Bannière — that Madame Bannière will outshine Baron, and that Baron will at once procure her an engagement at the Comédie-Française, so that we will all go and earn millions at the capital."

"Fie, flatterer!" said Olympe.

"Come, am I not right, Monsieur Bannière?"

"Right a hundred times over, Monsieur l'Abbé!" said Bannière, enthusiastically; for he anticipated three months of happiness with Olympe from the two hundred louis to be derived from the benefit.

"So long as she wants nothing," he said to himself, "or so long as she can have what she wants, I am sure that she will love me more than anybody else."

Alas! poor Bannière was not at the end of his woes.

From that moment the abbé busied himself about the performance as if he were the manager of the company. He arranged the scenery, distributed the parts, set the tailors and embroiderers at work, superintended the decorations, and attended every rehearsal.

Never did crowned head have such a body-guard as that which followed at Olympe's heels until the happy Sunday arrived.

Thanks to this body-guard, who seemed to be also a sort of genie with a magic wand, she had not even to express a wish; and if she did express one, it was gratified on the instant.

The result was that Bannière, observing the abbé's

assiduous attentions, became jealous again. He indulged in divers critical remarks upon the scenery and the abbé's taste.

But the abbé was wise in his generation, and received Bannière's spiteful flings without the least temper.

He pretended not to hear those which were evidently intended to be disagreeable.

"How lucky you are to have good eyes, dear Monsieur Bannière!" he would say. "Half the foolish things I do are chargeable to my bad eyes."

At last the day of the performance arrived.

For that day the abbé constituted himself leader of the claque.

Decidedly the abbé was able to turn his hand to anything; like Bannière, he had missed his vocation, and yet his black coat, his little cloak, and his neck-band went so well with his plump white hands, his rétroussé nose, and his cheeks fresh as a peach, that it would have been a great pity to see him in any other costume than his own.

He led the claque, then, and regulated the applause so that Baron was satisfied; but Olympe was enchanted.

The flowers and wreaths and applauding friends interested him much more than the receipts.

But Bannière was interested in the latter point, which was by no means a side issue with him as it was with the abbé. In the first place he abstracted twenty louis from the receipts to go and play double or quits a little while, with the purpose, of course, of realizing a hundred thousand livres or so of clear profit while they were applauding Olympe at the theatre.

But one cannot win on all sides at once. The twenty louis did not last an hour. When the twentieth vanished, he rose and looked about for his evil genius, La Catalane.

Luckily she was not there; if she had been, he would infallibly have wrung her neck, to be rid of her for good and all.

While Bannière was running off to gamble away the twenty louis he had borrowed from the receipts, the abbé was making himself conspicuous at the head of the applauding spectators, and assuring Olympe's triumph over Baron.

It was no simple thing to do, although at that time the famous tragedian, on the point of withdrawing not only from the dramatic stage but from the world's stage as well, was seventy-seven years of age. That fact did not, however, prevent him from playing Achille in "Iphigénie."

The performance ended, Baron, who was a gallant old fellow, placed upon Olympe's head the wreath which had been tossed to her; but he refused to sup with his comrades, alleging the weakness of his digestive organs as an excuse.

Olympe sought everywhere for Bannière.

She was uneasy at not seeing him, and especially so in view of the disappearance of the twenty louis, which indicated that, despite his oaths, — regular gambler's oaths, — he had flown back to the gaming-table.

The loss of twenty louis was nothing to her; but these successive failures of delicacy on her lover's part were much to her.

From time to time, in the midst of her triumph, she sighed as if she foreboded misfortune.

We have said that Bannière looked about to see if La Catalane was near him.

He did not see her, but he did see a fellow-gambler who was in funds and loaned Bannière twenty louis more.

Bannière returned to the fray with ardor.

XXIV.

THE SERENADE.

BANNIÈRE'S second twenty louis, or rather his friend's, being more carefully husbanded than the others, lasted four hours.

At the end of that time, after having twenty times been within an ace of winning the hundred thousand livres, to which his ambition was perforce limited, Bannière lost the twenty louis.

He left the place in a passion which we will not attempt to describe; it was complicated by all the agony of wounded self-esteem.

With the remembrance that he had been already laughed at and humiliated, and above all pardoned for a similar offence, he slunk home as shamefaced as a pickpocket after he has broken his oath to steal no more.

Despair possessed his soul; as he passed over a bridge, he almost determined to drown himself.

But Bannière was too much in love to drown himself. In his heart love overbore all other emotions. What has honor to do with a madman?

So Bannière did not jump into the river, but returned to Olympe with lagging steps.

"Poor girl!" he said to himself, "I am the only one who will have been missing at her triumph; I am the only one who will not have applauded and congratulated

her. She is probably waiting for me, as she was the last time, and will begin to reproach me. But I will submit to her reproaches, I will grovel at her feet, and she will forgive me once more. She will see that I must be accursed; and then after this I will make no more attempts to better our condition. No, they succeed too ill. Olympe is showing me the way; she is working hard, and I will follow her example. This fortune which we have been pursuing and which has thus far eluded us, will drop into our hands, perhaps, when we cease to seek it."

Bannière passed his icy hand across his burning brow.

"A thousand livres!" he cried; "two months' supply eaten up in four hours! But this time, at all events, Olympe cannot charge me with having ruined her, for I took only twenty louis of the hundred which were surely coming to us from the receipts of the performance. To be sure, I owe twenty others. Bah! those twenty others I will repay from my first winnings. One cannot lose forever."

Thus we see that in less than ten minutes Bannière had sworn never to play again, and had also promised himself to repay the money he had borrowed from his first winnings at play.

Revolving such thoughts in his brain, Bannière approached his place of abode.

It was a gloomy night; one o'clock was striking on the clock of the Carmelite Church, whose towers limited the view from Olympe's balcony.

When the last vibrations of the brazen tongue had ceased to disturb the air, Bannière still listened; it seemed to him that the music of the bells was continued by another, different sound.

He was not left long in suspense.

The sound was produced by musical instruments accompanied by a passably melodious voice.

Bannière, as he walked along, had the privilege of listening to a complete symphony; and having heard it through, he sought the symphonists.

They were drawn up in line under the windows of Olympe's bedroom.

Bannière at that moment cared little for anything under heaven, and for music least of all. Indeed nothing could have had a more irritating effect upon his nerves than the mournful, plaintive tones of the flute and violins, which accompanied the guitar of the principal performer.

The guitar itself accompanied the voice which Bannière had noticed as he entered the street,— a voice which he was quite sure that he had heard somewhere or other. In fact, as he drew nearer, he recognized in him who filled the triple functions of guitarist, vocalist, and leader of the orchestra, the Abbé d'Hoirac, arrayed *en cavalier*, putting on the most languishing airs and assuming languorous attitudes as he twisted his neck toward the balcony.

The air was a long and difficult one, and it must be said that the abbé sang it very well.

Behind her half-raised blind, Olympe — easily recognizable, as she made no attempt to conceal herself — was to be seen dressed in white; and although Bannière could not distinguish the expression of her face, he had no doubt that she was smiling.

The force of imagination, especially a jealous imagination, is so strong that Bannière actually saw the smile through the blind.

Blind rage flowed into his heart, as the music flowed into his ears.

At last the difficult morceau came to an end with these words, —

"Belle Phillis, dis-moi, 'Je t'aime!'
Et je n'ai plus rien à chanter."[1]

The Abbé d'Hoirac, having in accordance with universal custom repeated the last two lines of the finale a dozen or fifteen times, ceased his warbling with a blast which put the finishing touch to Bannière's exasperation.

He rushed upon D'Hoirac, and shouted in thunder-tones, —

"Ah, you have nothing more to sing! Very well, dance then!"

With that he seized him by the throat.

The abbé could not see clearly, and had besides the disadvantage of being taken by surprise, which did not prevent him, for he was a courageous little fellow, from defending himself valiantly with his guitar against this enemy of harmonious sounds, who seemed to come out of the bowels of the earth.

The symphonists undertook to come to the assistance of their leader; but Bannière had as many arms as Briareus. He broke two or three violins, and twisted five or six flutes out of shape, whereupon the musicians immediately took to their heels, — for your ordinary musician fears more for his instrument than for his skin.

Aided by the shrieks of Olympe, the abbé finally recognized Bannière. He charged him gallantly with his guitar, for the abbé was sufficiently well to do not to worry about his instrument; but Bannière tore it from his hands and broke it into a hundred pieces on his head.

"It 's very lucky for you," said the abbé, as he received the blow, "that I have no sword."

[1] "Lovely Phyllis, say to me, 'I love thee!'
And I have nothing more to sing."

"Ah, don't let that trouble you," retorted Bannière; "you can get one in ten minutes."

"Triple beast!" replied the abbé, "triple dolt! you know very well that I will not fight with you."

"Why not?" roared Bannière; "tell me, I say, tell me!"

"In the first place, because I should kill you, blind as I am, for you have never handled a sword."

"Who told you so?"

"*Parbleu!* that 's easy to see from your countrified manners; and then, too, you know very well that I am an abbé, and consequently have no right to wear the dress in which you insult me, so that if I should kill you or should have justice of you in any other way, I should be condemned twice over, — by the religious as well as the civil tribunals. That 's why, Monsieur Blackguard, you have acted like a boor and a coward. But, never fear! I 'll be even with you."

Bannière realized that he had been over-hasty, and, fearing the threat, vain as it was, he released his hold of the abbé, who hurried away.

The few windows appertaining to the houses on the street had been opened in consequence of the uproar Bannière made. Lights were lighted, and there was considerable shouting and questioning.

That might mean the patrol and arrest. In fact, it was not long before the cross-belts of the archers emerged from the dense darkness at the corner of the Carmelite Church, and Bannière had no more than time to glide into the house through the door which was held open for him by the terrified Olympe.

The patrol, following immemorial precedent, arrived some minutes too late; they found upon the field of battle nothing but some débris of violins and flutes

and the neck of a guitar. The worthy officials got entangled in the catgut, cursed a little, and that was the end of the matter.

But, his safety being assured, Bannière's rage became more violent than ever. He who had been seeking some means of moving Olympe to pity ten minutes before, had found a pretext for accusing her.

Being safely within doors, he assumed the most majestic attitude of which he was capable, folded his arms, and began to cross-examine her.

Olympe, whose first impulse had been to inquire affectionately for his welfare and if he were wounded, ceased abruptly the expression of her interest in the madman, and turned her back upon him as soon as he began to show his teeth.

Bannière was much more angered by this contemptuous silence than he would have been by an energetic reply. He ran after Olympe as she was returning to her room, and seized her roughly by the arm.

The beautiful creature turned pale from pain and shame combined, and uttered a cry like a wounded lioness, which brought her women running to her.

Bannière would have given his life to pulverize those three frail creatures who stood there before him, apparently ready to defy his wrath.

Olympe's cry was succeeded by the most profound silence, during which she raised the sleeve of her peignoir, and disclosed the red mark, already turning purple, of Bannière's fingers on the arm above the elbow.

The hairdresser threw herself weeping upon the lovely, maimed arm, which she covered with kisses, bellowing imprecations at Bannière the while.

Bannière disappeared within his own room, overwhelmed with shame, remorse, and terror.

Until ten o'clock on the following day the most absolute silence reigned in the house.

At ten o'clock Olympe rang for Claire, who hastened to her, accompanied by the hairdresser, who had left the house after the scene we have described, but had returned in the morning.

Claire was told to have lunch made ready. The hairdresser remained alone with her mistress, who asked indifferently what had become of *him*.

"Oh!" replied the hairdresser, "*he* went away this morning."

Olympe thought that her reply was given with peculiar emphasis, that she had given strange prominence to the word *he*, and she thought that the word, used as a demonstrative pronoun, was not sufficiently demonstrative.

"Of whom are you speaking?" she asked coldly, "and whom do you mean by *he?*"

The hairdresser saw that she was on the wrong road, and that the Abbé d'Hoirac was not yet the one *he*.

"I mean that Monsieur has gone out," she replied humbly. "But," she continued with animation, "it is very generous of Madame with her beauty, her talent, and her success, to allow herself to be made so unhappy."

"Who told you that I am unhappy, my friend?" said Olympe, disdainfully.

"What! is it not very evident, Madame?"

"From what?"

"Because you have wept all night."

"You are mistaken."

"Your lovely eyes have lost half their brightness,—eyes which are the admiration of the whole city."

Olympe shrugged her shoulders.

"Do you doubt it, Madame?" the temptress continued.

Olympe made no reply by word or motion.

"You must know, then," the hairdresser resumed, "that there are people who would lose their life willingly to obtain one glance from those eyes which you seem to despise."

"Oh," murmured Olympe, whose ear was tickled, sensible as she was, by the flattery, or rather by the praise,— "oh, as I have little belief in so great power — "

Praise is like perfume; wheresoever it comes from woman can always detect it afar and appreciate it.

"If you wish to make the trial, you would not be long in doubt."

"Trial of what?"

"Come, Madame, consider a little. Is he worthy of you, of an artist of your merit, a woman of your beauty? Is he worthy the having to go in a chair to the theatre, to live in this out-of-the-way quarter, to go without diamonds, and to wait till the day after a benefit performance to buy three dresses?"

"That is none of your affair, my dear."

"That's right," whimpered the hairdresser, pretending to weep; "make it a crime for me to love you, and to hate those who stand in the way of your happiness."

"I forbid your saying any ill of them, do you hear?"

"Forbid them, then, to blacken your lovely body; forbid them to steal your money for the purpose, not of gambling,— that would be nothing,— but of spending it with God knows whom!"

"Who keeps you so well posted?"

"People who know what they are talking about, Madame, never fear."

"The same who would give their life to obtain one of my glances, are they not?"

"And who are ready, besides, to lend Madame ten thousand livres a month to help her to maintain her posi-

tion, — something more substantial that, and consequently harder to find."

"Ten thousand livres a month," repeated Olympe, concealing her disgust; "so you are making a proposition to me, are you?"

"Official, yes, Madame," replied the hairdresser, emboldened by what she took to be an indication of surrender; "yes, a hundred and twenty thousand livres a year, payable quarterly, — that 's all. The first quarterly instalment is all ready; I have seen it."

Olympe rose, drew her beautiful blond locks from the woman's hands, and said to her, —

"Mademoiselle, this is so delicate and important a mission which has been intrusted to you that you must have been promised a handsome recompense. Go and claim it then, I beg, without losing a moment. Go!"

"What?" asked the hairdresser, in surprise.

"You do not understand me, I presume?"

"Why, no."

"I tell you to leave my house, Mademoiselle, and never show your face inside it again."

"But, Madame," said the wretch, in an undertone, "Monsieur is not hidden there, he has gone out."

"Oh, yes, you cannot understand how any one can refuse seriously a hundred and twenty thousand livres, payable quarterly," said Olympe, sadly. "For what do you take me, I should like to know?"

"Why, Madame, according to what Claire has told me, you received from Monsieur de Mailly — "

"Whatever I asked him for, Mademoiselle, and I asked much of him because I loved him much; and I refuse much to keep Monsieur de Bannière, because I am very fond of him. Consider that as settled, Mademoiselle, and leave my house."

The hairdresser, pale with anger, tried to defend herself.

"It 's no use; I understand you," Olympe interrupted. "Your principal fear at this moment is of losing the reward which was promised you. I owe you something, then, by way of recompense. Take these ten louis, and —adieu!"

The hairdresser at first held out her hand to take them, but suddenly her wrath got the upper hand.

"What sublime virtue," said she, "in a woman who ran away a year ago with a man whom she had known scarcely an hour!"

"Yes, I understand," said Olympe; "I can imagine your chagrin, my friend, for they offered you twenty times the paltry sum I can give you. But take it, nevertheless, and go offer your services to La Catalane. They will bring you in more money there with less difficulty."

The hairdresser's eyes shone with sudden fire.

"Ah!" said she, "you turn me out, and put such ideas as this in my head! Very good, I will profit by them."

Throwing the ten louis upon the carpet, she hurried off at headlong speed to La Catalane, who lived in the neighborhood of the theatre.

Olympe congratulated herself, when the woman had gone, upon not feeling the least regret for having done a worthy action.

XXV.

HOW HAIRDRESSERS EARN THEIR WAGES.

La Catalane, to whom Olympe advised her hairdresser to offer her services, was not very well disposed toward Mademoiselle de Clèves.

It seldom happens that a woman casts an envious eye upon another woman's lover, without considerable hard feeling against that other, even if she has succeeded in stealing the lover away; never without deadly hatred if the lover has declined to allow himself to be stolen. It is true that she may visit a little of her enmity upon the too faithful swain.

We are about to see what Mademoiselle de Clèves's feelings were, as interpreted by La Catalane, after which we will lay bare La Catalane's reflections upon the subject.

"I 'll wager that I know what you have come for," said she.

"You know!" cried the hairdresser.

"Yes."

"What do you think?"

"That Olympe has turned you out of doors."

"How did you guess that?" asked the amazed hairdresser.

"Oh! there was nothing difficult about it. You received the Abbé d'Hoirac this morning, and he is madly in love with Olympe. If he came to see you, it was not on your own account, was it? So it must have

been on hers. If he came to see you, he did n't go away without giving you money — you sigh — well, without promising it to you, then. That is why I think you probably tried to-day to convey his declaration to Olympe; and as you are as red as a turkey-cock, and sulky, it must be because you did not succeed."

"Can you imagine such a thing?" cried the hair-dresser, seating herself without ceremony, and without objection from La Catalane.

"What reason did she give for her refusal?" asked the latter.

"An incredible one."

"What was it, pray?"

"She says that she loves Monsieur Bannière, the vagabond."

"Oh, he 's a fine fellow, Agathe."

"I know him well."

"You tell me that she can still love Bannière, and yet — "

"*Parbleu!* that makes no difference."

"Mademoiselle Agathe," said La Catalane, with a laugh, "your morals are as lax as if you were a duchess; take care!"

"Do you know that this virtue of hers has cost me two thousand livres, — yes, more than that, — a hundred louis?"

"What would you have, my girl? You must prove that you have a great heart; you must prove that you despise money; you must take the loss philosophically."

"I lose a hundred louis which I almost had in my hand!" cried Agathe, opening wide her glassy eyes, which the hope of gain had brightened up; "oh, never, never!"

"I don't imagine, however, that you expect to compel

Olympe to become madly in love with the abbé, especially if she does n't choose to do so."

Agathe emitted a great sigh of anger, which might have passed for a very respectable roar.

"You would have preferred to deal with me, would n't you?" La Catalane asked, laughing. "I am not the woman to cause my friends so much annoyance. But what would you have? Certain heads attract good fortune, as the magnet does a needle. I have no chance, you see; and yet, if one looks closely at me — "

"Or even if one goes into details," said Agathe.

"At all events, I have a well-shaped head of my own," said La Catalane.

"And your neck, too," said Agathe.

"And this foot," said La Catalane, "is not very large or ill-shaped."

"And then your hands," said the hairdresser, "and your figure, and your waist! Ah, Mademoiselle, in my opinion one woman is as good as another."

"What! you see that that is n't so, Agathe, since the abbé offers Olympe what he does not offer me. How much did he offer her, by the way?"

"Ten thousand livres a month!" cried the hairdresser.

"The devil! that is a snug little sum, though, — one hundred and twenty thousand livres a year! What a pity that the little fellow, who is near-sighted, is n't stone-blind!"

"Why so, Mademoiselle?"

"Because then you would bring him here, as if you were taking him to Olympe; because I would assume my silvery, flute-like voice, — Olympe's voice, in fact, which I mimic so well in the green-room as to make everybody laugh, — and I would say to the abbé sentimentally, as Olympe would say, "Monsieur, what is asked of me I sometimes refuse; what one does not expect, I give."

"Oho!" said Agathe.

"And as he would be blind —"

"Well?"

"Well, stupid! I would have my ten thousand livres, that 's all."

"What?"

"And you would have your twenty-four hundred livres."

The hairdresser grasped her hair with both hands, and almost tore it out.

"Don't despair," said La Catalane; "put his eyes out."

"Ah, Mademoiselle, you have the heart to joke."

"What the deuce would you have me do, — jump overboard, or hang myself, or suffocate myself?"

"Oh, no, I would have you do nothing of the kind, it would be too great a sin; but I would have you get angry because a Bannière prevents us —"

"Prevents *you*, you mean; confess that it 's the twenty-four hundred livres which sits especially heavy on your mind."

"Now look here!" rejoined Agathe, her eyes blazing with wrath and cupidity; "if I were in your place, I would not like to be worsted in this little scheme of ours; and to induce Mademoiselle Olympe to yield to the Abbé d'Hoirac, I would —"

"What would you do?"

"Well, if I were La Catalane, I would steal Mademoiselle Olympe's lover away from her."

La Catalane burst out laughing.

"Yes, yes, yes," the hairdresser went on; "I tell you that is the way, the true way. She will very soon find it out, for her friends will tell her; furthermore, if her friends fail to tell her, you can tell her yourself. She is

as proud as Roxana, and will never forgive unfaithfulness, and from very rage, perhaps, she would put me in a way to lay hold of our twenty-four hundred livres."

"You keep saying *our;* why don't you say *my?*"

"I say *our*, because if you take up with Monsieur Bannière, I will share with you what Monsieur l'Abbé gives me. Make the attempt, I beg, I implore you, to take Monsieur Bannière away from Olympe; that will be so easy for you, especially as he is such a fine fellow, as you just said yourself."

"What!" cried the giddy creature, laughing louder than before, "do you fancy that to-day is the first time I have discovered the attractions of that young man? Why, for six months I have had my eye on him."

"Oh, well, then," said the hairdresser, delightedly,— "oh, well, then, it's as good as done."

"You idiot!" retorted La Catalane, "as I have had my eye on him for six months, it would have been done six months ago, if it could be done."

"Why has it not been done, pray?"

"Because there is a more serious difficulty. We are just in the position of Harlequin desirous of marrying Columbine; the wedding would come off, if it depended on Harlequin only. Unfortunately the consent of Columbine is necessary, and Columbine will not give her consent."

"Nonsense!"

"It's as I tell you, my dear, — Columbine Bannière has no use for Harlequin Catalane."

"Have you made eyes at him?"

"I have tried him with every variety of languishing glances. Joseph was less innocent and more venturesome than he."

"He paid no attention?"

"Not the least in the world."

"Then I am lost," cried the hairdresser, despondently.

"Ah, *dame!*" retorted La Catalane; "if you are clever enough to bring him here to me some evening, or to take me to Olympe's quarters, I will answer for it that we could carry it through."

"Oh, that would be admirable!" exclaimed the hairdresser, in deep thought.

"Admirable is the very word; and for my own part, as I am a generous body, and what I want before everything else is Bannière, if we succeed, I will take him and make no claim on your hundred louis."

"Hum! how can we do it?" muttered Agathe.

"*Dame!* that's your affair. Select some evening when Olympe is to act, and when she will be delayed at the theatre by some social gathering; invent or create some means of postponing her return; meanwhile I will step into her room."

"But suppose she should return and surprise you?"

'Oh, well, then there would be just what we want, — trouble and scandal."

"What then?"

"It will be much worse than if Bannière were enticed here, for the poor wretch will be in his own and Olympe's house, — in the conjugal domicile, so to speak. That will be enough to make mischief between them for the other world as well as this. Come, what are you thinking so seriously about?"

"Ah, I am thinking that this scheme that you propose will be very difficult to carry out."

"Very well, my friend," said La Catalane, "if you choose to give up your share in it, I propose to carry it out on my own account. Since we have been talking about it, I have become enthusiastic for it."

"And —"

"And I will try it, at all events."

"Ah, *mon Dieu!*" suddenly exclaimed the hairdresser.

"What is it, pray?"

"Oh, such an idea!"

"Are you going mad?"

"Oh, Mademoiselle, indeed it is a most excellent idea."

"Tell me what it is, then."

"Yes, that's the thing to do, Mademoiselle; it's all arranged."

"I am to have Bannière?"

"Well, no."

"What am I to have, then? I warn you that I propose to hold out for something."

"You will have the ten thousand livres."

"You are losing your wits."

"Not at all, not at all."

"What are you doing, pray?"

"I am turning the matter over in my mind."

"Well, I am all at sea myself."

"Have you any decided dislike for poor Abbé d'Hoirac, Mademoiselle?"

"I, for the abbé?"

"Yes, for the abbé. Ah, he's a very good fellow, after all."

"Well, suppose I have a decided liking for him, what has that to do with it?"

"Oh, you will see, you will see."

"Well, I ask nothing better than to see; but you don't show me anything."

"Instead of surreptitiously introducing you into Olympe's house, which presents a thousand difficulties

and would lead to nothing, or at least to nothing of any account — "

"What! nothing of any account?"

"No. For suppose that everything turns out as you wish, may it not be that Olympe will forgive Bannière, after all; may it not be that an investigation will put us to shame; last of all, may it not be that even though she believes Bannière unfaithful, Olympe will resist as stoutly afterwards as before?"

"Do you really believe her virtuous, then?"

"Alas, yes."

"Indeed, it is very possible that it would be as you say," said La Catalane; "but even so I shall have lost nothing."

"Very true, but on the other hand I shall have earned nothing. No, no, no! I have a better plan than that. I have a plan to give you the ten thousand livres without prejudice to Bannière."

"Ah, a golden plan that, my girl!"

"It is this."

"I am listening."

"The abbé, when he sent me upon the mission which you know about, gave me full powers in case of success; that is to say, he directed me to hire a well-furnished house for the use of Olympe, who might be expected, perhaps, in the early days of this new arrangement, to retain sufficient scruples concerning the former one to forbid her throwing Bannière over at the very first; the abbé, too, has precautions to take, for he is married to Mother Church."

"Oh, our abbés, notwithstanding that nuptial bond, have adopted since the regency so general a custom of living like bachelors — "

"No matter; I know what I am saying, and I see where I am going."

"Go on, then."

"Where was I?"

"You were at the house."

"Oh, yes; instead of telling the abbé that Olympe refuses, I will tell him that she accepts."

"Be careful!"

"Don't interrupt me."

"But what about Olympe's virtue?"

"That's just what I'm getting at; it is with that same virtue that I am going to make my trap. I will surround the affair with all sorts of rebuffs and volleys and sorties, just like what happens in besieging strong fortresses; if necessary, I will use up a week in saying 'yes' to the abbé,— nine days, perhaps; that will be three days for each letter."

"Upon my word!"

"Then, when the house is rented, and everything all ready, I will say that the fair one will consent to nothing but a mysterious, secret interview."

"Good, again; but how will you get out of it at the last moment?"

"Why, at the last moment you will be there, of course."

"I?"

"Didn't you tell me that you have no feeling of repugnance for the abbé?"

"I have no repugnance for anybody; that is, I am not a stand-offish, affected fine lady like Olympe."

"Very well, then; the appointment being made, you will keep it."

"Oh, yes!"

"That's a good plan, I think, eh?"

"Magnificent for half an hour."

"But why not for more than one half-hour? Is n't the abbé as blind as a bat?"

"Just because of his blindness," said La Catalane, with a sigh, "he will want to see better than those with the most perfect sight."

"Well, what is there to worry about? The conditions will be made; and if worse comes to worst, and you are discovered, you will have your ten thousand livres, and I my twenty-four hundred."

"Yes; but the abbé will make a great noise over it, and shut us up in some For-l'Évêque."

"The abbé will keep quiet; his interest will lie wholly in doing so. How can you suppose that an abbé who swallowed Bannière's blows with a guitar without a word, will go blathering about concerning such a palpable deception as that? No; he will swallow the exchange even more mildly, depend upon it!"

"Upon my soul, it is marvellous, — the way you have thought out all that."

"Why should I not? But what do you say, — will you or won't you?"

"The most piquant thing about it," said La Catalane, maliciously, "and the most interesting, is that if we should content ourselves with one experience, and the fraud should not be discovered at the time, the abbé would be furious with rage, and would disclose the whole thing, and everything would point so clearly to Olympe's guilt that she would not know how to justify herself."

"That very prospect is tempting to me, I admit; and in addition to that, when the disclosure is made, Bannière, who is a sensitive fellow too, will abandon Olympe, and you will have him at your mercy."

"That 's very possible, I think myself."

"Does that decide you?"

"Yes, it does, indeed."

"Shall I put the irons in the fire?"

"In with them!"

"Do you give me *carte blanche?*"

"I give you *carte noire*, which is much better."

"On your word of honor?"

"*Foi de Catalane!* I have no desire to deceive you."

"Give me your hand."

"Done!" cried La Catalane, clapping her little hand vigorously against the broad, rough palm of the hairdresser.

XXVI.

LOVE AND MYOPIA.

Once the plot was laid by these two female demons, it only remained to put it in execution.

It was a simple matter.

The abbé, upon receiving the hairdresser's agreement, had ordered her, whom he had constituted at once his factotum and ambassadress, to hire and furnish suitable apartments for Olympe's reception on the day when, besieged like Danae by a shower of gold, she should strike her colors.

The go-between was too shrewd either to tell the abbé of the absolute check she had met with, or to arouse his hopes too suddenly. She represented to her employer that she had been repulsed, to be sure, but that she had, as she withdrew, carefully studied a certain advantageous position, which she thought she might gradually carry, and which, when once she had carried it, would inevitably assure the victory which had eluded her once, but was not lost forever.

Furthermore, the abbé might have his suspicions, for he had had a taste of Olympe's virtue, — Olympe, who was so gentle when she was left in peace, but was so quick to bristle up at the least alarm; and it was necessary that his suspicions should be allowed to die away gradually as his passion grew. The hairdresser was like the expert fisherman who does not pull on his line until the fish has taken a good bite.

Thus a series of imaginary operations was carried on around Olympe, like those which take place about a besieged town. Progress was duly reported to the abbé, as to Louis XIV. at Nimeguen, and like Louis XIV., he saw for himself very little of the progress of the siege. To-day they had drawn the line of circumvallation, to-morrow work would begin in the trenches, day after to-morrow the sappers and miners would be called upon, and on the following day the mine would be exploded. And the abbé listened to all this, like a vainglorious general or a blind lover, — which two types have many points of resemblance.

A month passed in siege-operations. The general became more and more impatient, the lover more and more madly in love.

At last, one fine morning, the hairdresser called upon the abbé with a radiant visage. Olympe's virtue, she said, was beginning to sound a parley and to talk of surrender; but it wished to surrender with all the honors of war.

So long as Olympe surrendered, the abbé cared little for the terms, and there was no haggling over them.

Only the night before the abbé had said (and the hairdresser had used his words as the inducement to the proposed capitulation), —

"If she will listen to me, and I can please her, though it be but for one moment! I shall be the happiest man on earth."

"The happiest man on earth, if you can please her, though it be but for a moment!" the hairdresser had repeated after him.

"Why, yes!" he had replied testily. "*Parbleu!* I know perfectly well that in her heart she loves that blackguard Bannière."

"Alas! it is her one fault."

"But," the abbé had continued, "I expect nothing more from her than the gratification of a mere caprice. I have no ambition for her love."

A rare lover's prospectus that; but as everybody knows, subscriptions are still obtained to-day upon the strength of prospectuses.

The hairdresser reported, then, that Olympe had assented to the abbé's prospectus. The terms of subscription remained to be settled.

They were discussed for three days.

On the third day the female flag of truce brought the actress's ultimatum.

She was to appoint the days of meeting.

Agreed.

Those days would be nights, since it was at night that Bannière gambled as a rule, and Olympe was not free at any other time.

Agreed.

The meetings were always to take place in utter darkness.

The abbé cried out at this.

The hairdresser fell back upon the fable of Psyche and Cupid; only the parts were reversed,— the abbé had the rôle of Psyche, and Olympe that of Cupid.

If the abbé undertook to make use of the least glimmer of light, were it a lamp, a dark lantern, or a match, Psyche would fly away, like Venus's son, forever.

This condition was discussed for thirty-six hours; but the hairdresser, claiming to act for Olympe, would not budge. At last the abbé yielded; but he said, as he did so, that he was induced to accept that humiliating condition only because of his near-sightedness, which made it less important for him than for most people.

Article three, then, was agreed to as the others had been.

Olympe alone was to have the key of the apartments. She was never to make appointments in writing, letters being a weapon invented by the devil himself for the benefit of injured husbands and jealous guardians; on those days, or nights rather, when Olympe was willing to receive the abbé, she would send him the key, and he would know what it meant.

This article was agreed to like the others, with the added condition that the key should be returned on the following day, or the day after that at the very latest.

Three days later, the abbé, who gasped at every stroke of the bell, received the key from the hand of the hairdresser, with no other comment than these words,—

"This evening at eleven."

The abbé leaped for joy, took the key, kissed it, and began to dance around his room, singing an air from a comic opera.

When the hour arrived, the vanquisher of hearts, in his smartest attire, perfumed, and intoxicated with delight, issued forth, glided with beating heart into a little hall of the mysterious house, ascended to the first floor, and found in the anteroom the hairdresser, who led him as unerringly as Ariadne's thread to the heart of the labyrinth, whence he did not emerge until daybreak.

If the proposition had been made to renounce the meetings promised for the future, and accept in exchange the cross of an archbishop or a cardinal's hat, he would certainly have refused. Moreover we must remember that the abbé's ambition did not lie in the direction of ecclesiastical preferment.

It goes without saying that Monsieur d'Hoirac, most

near-sighted of men, had triumphed over the scruples of La Catalane, scented with vervain, which was the perfume most affected by Olympe.

In accordance with the terms of the treaty, the abbé left the key in the door.

But his passion had reached such a height that he began the very next morning to persecute the hairdresser with demands that the key which he had left in the door should be sent back to him. He urged especially that he was anxious to give his dear mistress some proofs of his esteem for her. Above all, he was ashamed of her impoverished state, which was due to that wretched Bannière.

He went on at great length as to the use he expected to make of his wealth, and the prosperity which he had in mind for Olympe, and in which, of course, her confidante would share.

Less than this would have been necessary to convince the hairdresser. La Catalane, too, was equally desirous of money and revenge. So the two impostors agreed to have the meetings at regular intervals, their frequency to be governed by the generosity of the Abbé d'Hoirac, and to enjoy such tranquillity as the imprudent actions he would not fail to commit would leave at their disposal.

A second rendezvous was granted at a reasonable interval from the first. Its result was to change the abbé's passion to delirium, and to transfer to the hands of La Catalane the ten thousand livres, and to those of the hairdresser the two hundred louis, so impatiently expected.

But it can readily be understood that these nocturnal meetings were multiplied to no purpose, for they brought only a vague and incomplete happiness to the abbé's

heart. It was much like the happiness of a thief; it surely was not that of a lover; and so he passed the day seeking the society of Olympe, who was so imperfectly his, since she was his only one night out of five or six, and even then he was not allowed to see her face.

Love is distinguished from simple desire in this, — that it is developed by the continual presence of the beloved object. So, after three weeks or a month of these meetings, a love had grown up in the abbé's heart which Olympe's whole life would have failed to satisfy.

As for Bannière his days were passing in happiness and content. One day, when he had nothing more to sell or pledge to Jacob, he ventured to ask him for a loan upon his simple note of hand; and the Jew concluded to let him have it at ten per cent, which was dirt-cheap, considering Bannière's financial condition.

This unexpected supply of credit came, as will be imagined, from that golden spring called the Abbé d'Hoirac. Olympe, as he supposed, had told him that she was free when Bannière was playing; and the abbé, in order to facilitate his meetings with Olympe, did his best to make easy Bannière's road to the gambling-hell.

Poor Olympe was the only one who reaped no advantage from all this, except in the greater loneliness of her life; the Abbé d'Hoirac had ceased to visit her, and Bannière never left the gaming-table.

Meanwhile each meeting, while it increased D'Hoirac's passion for Olympe, put a fresh restraint upon it; for the false Olympe demanded, as a condition precedent to each, that he would make no attempt to see her except in secret.

D'Hoirac, as we have seen, began by promising; he was too much in love not to promise whatever was asked, and as he renewed the promise every time he was called

upon, and kept it too, he assured the success of the schemes of the two plotters in the interval.

He had even been instructed to maintain toward Olympe, when chance threw them together, the attitude of a man who had been repulsed and shown the door, and was crushed thereby. They had made him swear that he would hardly bow to her on the public promenade, that he would never approach her unless invited, that he would never show himself at her house, either in person or through any intermediary, and above all, that he would never write to her.

We have noted above the joint theory of La Catalane and the hairdresser on the subject of letters.

He had bowed very slightly to her when they met.

He had often hung about her, but had never visited her, either at her home, in her dressing-room at the theatre, or in her chair.

He had ceased sending her flowers and letters and messages.

Everything, in short, was working to the perfect satisfaction of La Catalane and her prime minister, the hairdresser.

But an occurrence, as simple as most of those which upset plans and fortunes and empires, came very near foiling the clever combination of these two worthy females.

XXVII.

A WOMAN'S HEART.

Olympe had said nothing personally to the abbé; but in turning the hairdresser out of doors in consequence of the insulting propositions she had made to her, she had effectively turned the abbé out as well.

Now, since he had been thus ejected, the abbé, believing himself, as we have seen, to be the happiest man on earth, had borne himself with a degree of consideration, reserve, and delicacy which Olympe was very far from attributing to its true cause.

Indeed, his manly way of supporting a blow which must have borne hard upon his self-esteem as well as upon his passion, touched Olympe to some extent.

She had gone so far as to reproach herself for having closed her doors upon a civil fellow who had been brutally treated by Bannière, and to whom she owed some kindly consideration rather than such extreme harshness.

For indeed the worthy man had been guilty of nothing more than a little gallantry.

So it was that whenever she saw him avoid her, draw aside to let her pass at the theatre, turn about to escape her in the street, and all this with humble salutations and reverences, and a respectful submission fit to bend the hardest heart; whenever at the accustomed hour she — the poor, deserted creature, so ill repaid for her virtue — failed to see him come into her parlor, coquettish and airy and clever, with his bouquets and his music, — she

felt away down in her heart an emotion which almost resembled remorse.

It was not that Olympe had the least symptom of caring for this youth. Oh, *mon Dieu!* no. But a woman never forgets a wealthy, attractive, and civil young man who has cared for her.

Besides, as we have said, to her mind the abbé at this crisis was apparently bearing himself toward her with a noble and dignified pride which commended itself to her.

This astonished her, and, beginning there, decidedly attracted her, especially as she might have looked for unpleasant reprisals in view of his somewhat boastful and extremely noisy disposition. How many men in D'Hoirac's position would have made a great noise about their former friendly relations, and have exchanged their love for hatred, their servility for insolence, and their gifts for hostilities!

For a week Olympe had thoroughly expected to be hissed, and pestered to death, as is so often the case after such execution as she had done.

Was the abbé keeping quiet only from fear of Bannière? That was hard to believe, notwithstanding the adventure of the serenade. She knew the little man to be as brave as he was near-sighted; she knew, too, that he had enough gentle blood in his veins, and consequently must be stout-hearted enough to hold his own against hotter heads and more dangerous swords than the head and sword of Monsieur Bannière.

His reserve and his modest demeanor, then, could only be attributed to his delicacy of perception and his noble heart.

Olympe was moved by all this,— so moved that she would not allow any one in her presence to speak deri-

sively of Monsieur d'Hoirac; so touched that she promised herself to make reparation to the worthy man, one day or another, as occasion might offer.

Alas! it is the misfortune of husbands, and of lovers too, that the occasion always does offer, to those who seek it, to make reparation to worthy folk whom they have insulted.

Bannière spoke one afternoon of going partridge-shooting with two friends of the green cloth. Olympe suggested that she should bear them company as far as the outskirts of the city.

The plan was carried out; and Olympe in her carriage did not leave the gentlemen until they were outside the walls, and the dogs had begun to rummage around in the long grass.

She was driving back alone, at a foot-pace, lost in thought, and listening abstractedly to the occasional distant reports of Bannière's gun, when she espied at the corner of a street the Abbé d'Hoirac, dressed *en cavalier* and astride an excellent horse.

He was followed by a servant who carried his sword.

Seen thus, with his good looks and his smart attire, the abbé had quite the air of a well-to-do gentleman, or even of a prince in disguise. Riding erect in his stirrups, as the English do, he was managing his mount very cleverly, upon my word! But with all his address the abbé was none the less the most near-sighted of men; and he would have passed very near Olympe without seeing her, if she had not suddenly, watching her opportunity, thought that she would never have a better one, and so cried out in her high treble, —

"Oh, Abbé, Abbé!"

The abbé recognized the voice; and although he saw hardly more than a cloud, albeit a cloud which, like

those of Virgil, enshrouded a divinity, he dug his spurs so deep into his horse's flanks, as he turned in the direction of the voice, that he very nearly made him leap over the carriage.

"Is it you," he cried, "is it you who call me? Where are you, Madame, where are you?"

"I was obliged to call you," said Olympe, "since you were passing by so proudly without noticing me."

"Well," said the abbé, smiling, "have I anything else to do than obey your orders, and have you not forbidden me to approach you?"

"There, there!" said she, somewhat startled by the aspect of those mild eyes which, for all their myopia, seemed to say, by the flames that shot forth from them, so many things which she could not understand, — "there, there, now that we are face to face, can't we get along like good friends without quarrelling or speaking of love? No, let us be staid and dignified, and all will be well."

"Madame, you enchant me," said D'Hoirac, feeling for the hand which Olympe held out to him. "What! am I to have the privilege of seeing you, not only as I see you now, but *also* at your own house?"

Olympe failed to comprehend the force of that "also," and was about to request an explanation; but a gambol on the horse's part interrupted her. She gave a little shriek as she saw the abbé apparently at the mercy of the spirited animal's antics.

He mastered him, however, for the abbé was an excellent horseman, but it was too late then; they were approaching the city, and Olympe contented herself with saying:

"Leave me now, for people will talk if they should see me go out with Monsieur Bannière and return with Monsieur d'Hoirac. Leave me and come to see me when you choose."

"Oh!" exclaimed the abbé.

"But only on one condition," said Olympe.

"Tell me what it is."

"That you are never to say a word which Monsieur Bannière, of whom I am very fond, would not like to hear."

The abbé made a wry face; but still, even on those conditions, he considered the game worth the candle.

"Thanks, thanks!" said he; "I promise."

He rode off, beaming with satisfaction, across the fields, while Olympe re-entered the city.

The abbé lost no time in telling his happiness to the hairdresser, who ran off to La Catalane with her embarrassment.

"We are lost," said La Catalane, "if those two creatures meet; for they will spoil all as soon as they speak. They must not meet."

"It is impossible to prevent it since he has Olympe's permission; but as soon as he goes back there, I must go too."

"How can you fix it?"

"I will think it over."

"Reflect also that love has nothing whatever to do with her taking him back out of friendship."

The hairdresser began by seeking out D'Hoirac, and informing him that he had obtained leave to call upon Olympe again through her influence. But the leave was granted only upon the most severe conditions: he must never allude in the most distant way to anything that had taken place at the secret meetings; he must never betray, by too much animation of word or gesture, the degree of familiarity which they had reached; only his eyes were at liberty to speak: the eyes can say many things, but a woman is always at liberty to maintain that she does not understand their language.

The abbé understood the situation perfectly, and placed in the hairdresser's hands an oath drawn up with sacramental formality.

Armed with that document, the hairdresser wrote to Olympe.

Her letter was a perfect model of humility; she resorted to every known form of supplication. Since she had had the misfortune to harbor the bare idea of becoming a dishonest woman, everything had gone ill with her. She had lost her best customers in the city; her theatrical customers did not pay her, and she said that she had an enormous account against La Catalane, and could not collect a sou of it. Her only hope was that Olympe, so kind and lovely, would forgive her; with disgrace misfortune had come upon her, with pardon good fortune would return.

Olympe was proud, for she had chastised the abbé and his go-between, and both, instead of scheming against her, were at her feet.

She thought that it would be inconsistent to forgive one and not the other; so, for consistency's sake, she forgave both.

Sometimes it is a very dangerous thing for a woman to be too consistent.

The hairdresser was readmitted to Olympe's abode, just an hour before the abbé was to make his reappearance.

There had been another matter to be arranged before that reappearance was permitted. It was necessary to reconcile Bannière to the prospect; but during the two or three months that the abbé had stayed away, Bannière had been completely reassured by observing his continued respectful bearing toward Olympe. Still more was he reassured by her well-known loyalty. He had pommelled

the abbé, on the occasion of the serenade, much less because he was jealous than because he had been losing at play.

The poor abbé, reinstated as a welcome guest at the house and supported there by the presence of the hairdresser, devoted himself from morning till night to that conversation with the eyes which alone his oath permitted him to hold with Olympe, — manœuvres which indifferent observers call mere flirting, but interested participants, amorous languor, — a sort of radiation from the whole person of him who loves toward the beloved object; Olympe naturally understanding nothing of it all, and greeting with harmless merriment the tender and melancholy contortions of the charming dandy.

D'Hoirac, like all those who are thoroughly deceived, and are manfully trudging along the wrong road, believing themselves to be going right, was lost in admiration of the prudence, the firmness, the sweet and modest reserve of this lovely creature. He was considerably disappointed to find that she was so afraid of Bannière; but he had not assumed sufficient authority to justify him in daring to combat openly against a custom of longer standing than his own.

It is easy to understand how thoroughly and vigilantly the hairdresser, having won her way back into Olympe's good graces by her humility, watched over poor D'Hoirac, and moderated his excitement; he was always ready to rush in headlong, like young dogs in the hunting-field, at the first scent or sight of the quarry.

She was convinced that, despite his plighted word, the first *tête-a-tête* of any length would be employed by our turtle-dove in cooing and assuming airs of proprietorship which would astonish Olympe, and lead to embarrassing explanations.

Now, to allow an explanation before the bird was thoroughly plucked, and before injured self-interest and wounded self-esteem had been thoroughly avenged, was a blunder which two such birds of prey as the hairdresser and La Catalane would have blushed to make.

The hairdresser indeed played her part admirably; she had returned to Olympe's service as the abbé's enemy, and in that capacity she naturally became very friendly to Monsieur Bannière. In this twofold character, the object dearest to her heart was to maintain absolutely unsullied the dearest possession of our actor, which was constantly assailed by the gestures and the eyes, if not by the tongue, of that accursed Abbé d'Hoirac.

Nothing therefore was more in accordance with Olympe's wishes, and at the same time more convenient for the woman herself, than her continual presence, or incessant going and coming in the room where the abbé and Olympe used to sit; so that the infernal adroitness of the woman had actually effected the removal of all obstacles to her success by the very people who were most interested in her failure.

But the abbé was not the man to waste his strength in vain struggles. He made a study of the hairdresser's tastes, and thought that she seemed to be particularly enthusiastic on the subject of maraschino.

He sent her six bottles by his servant, whom he directed to put them into her own hands; and about an hour later he stealthily rang the bell very softly, stole by Mademoiselle Claire, slipping five louis into her hand, and glided into Olympe's boudoir, with a feeling of additional security because he thought that he saw the hairdresser, through the half-open door of the kitchen, drinking maraschino out of the bottle.

Alas! one cannot anticipate everything. Even the marten, shrewdest of animals, sometimes walks into the trap; and the hairdresser, shrewdest of females, was for once as unwary as the marten.

Bannière had gone to play as usual; D'Hoirac accordingly found Olympe alone, and began operations by taking her hand and kissing it affectionately.

Olympe was in very good humor. She did not notice how flushed the abbé's face was, or the nervous twitching of his hands, or how his blue eyes rolled around under their black lashes, — eyes which, notwithstanding their defective sight, seemed to give forth electric sparks.

The fair Célimène had heard from Claire of the maraschino he had sent, and at first she joked him upon the quantity.

He looked about, and making as sure as he could with his poor eyes reinforced by glasses that there was no one in the room, he said, —

"You are quite alone?"

"Why, yes, I think so," replied Olympe, astonished at the question.

"Then I may speak to you frankly."

"There is nothing to prevent."

"Oh, how jealous I am!" cried the abbé.

"Jealous! of what?" she asked.

"Can't you guess?"

"Upon my word, no."

"Why, jealous of him who takes my happiness from me, of him who steals my very life!"

"Come, come!" said Olympe, "so that nonsense has taken hold of you again?"

"But it has never left me."

"Well, then, you propose to begin again?"

"But since we are alone, my dear heart!"

Olympe exclaimed in amazement. She thought she must have heard amiss.

The abbé stopped, gazing at her with his great eyes.

"Did I understand you to say *my heart?*" demanded Olympe.

"Why, yes," said the abbé, "you are my love, my life, my heart!"

Olympe fairly shouted with laughter.

The abbé, stupefied at her behavior, looked about to see if there were not some person in the chamber whom his myopic eyes had not detected.

"How many jugs of maraschino did you keep for yourself, dear Monsieur d'Hoirac?" said Olympe, in a tone of raillery.

"Come now," said the abbé, imploringly, "let me talk sense to you a little while."

"I certainly have no objection, for so far you have talked nothing but the veriest nonsense."

"For Heaven's sake, Olympe, drop this mask, which deceives me in spite of myself."

"This mask?"

"If you knew how much suffering it causes me."

"What mask?"

"Oh," cried the abbé, rising to throw himself down at Olympe's knees, "it is impossible for me to see you playing such a comedy any longer; and —"

He had not finished his sentence, he had not executed his contemplated movement, he had not touched Olympe with the end of his finger, when the hairdresser, flushed, dishevelled, and gasping for breath, rushed into the room, and almost fell between the near-sighted abbé and her mistress.

Olympe's towering wrath, the victorious yet suppliant attitude of the abbé, told the hairdresser that she had

arrived in the nick of time, and that it would have been all up with the secret a moment later.

Olympe, seeing her frightened appearance, could not help laughing.

"You called me, Madame?" cried the woman.

"No; but I was just about to call you," Olympe replied, with a withering glance in the direction of Monsieur d'Hoirac.

The abbé made an attempt to justify himself.

"Monsieur," said Olympe, "you know, I think, on what conditions I receive you at my house."

"What then?"

"What then! Why, you have broken them, that's all."

"Ah, my dear!" cried the abbé, dismayed at the tone in which she addressed him.

"Again!" said she.

"But it's before nobody but her!" cried the abbé, in despair, — "before your confidante! so it's exactly the same as if we were alone."

"Are you mad?" exclaimed the hairdresser, seizing him by the arm and twirling him around.

"Show the abbé out," said Olympe, "and request him not to drink any more maraschino on the days he proposes to come here."

The hairdresser hastened to drag out Monsieur d'Hoirac, rather than show him out.

Olympe observed her zeal and misunderstood it, as the whole world would have done, La Catalane alone excepted. She laughed so immoderately that the abbé could hear her mocking cachinnations in the antechamber.

The hairdresser had no sooner got him out of Olympe's presence than she began, —

"Oh, you wretched man, you will ruin everything."

"What was the matter?" asked the near-sighted fellow; "was there some one hidden there, after all? Why did n't she tell me so at first?"

"No, there was no one."

"Then why all this fuss, if we were alone?"

"Oh, how stupid men are!"

"But in what! Tell me, or I 'll curse myself."

"Was n't I there?"

"Suppose you were! Are you not the echoless wall which hears our vows, the deaf partition which sees our kisses? Does she hide herself from you, pray, — you, our go-between and confidante?"

"Stupid! stupid!" muttered the hairdresser, delighted with the word, which drove the abbé mad. "Stupid! not to appreciate all that woman's delicacy!"

"But it was the same thing before you came, when we were entirely alone."

"But, Monsieur, don't you know that there are secrets which a woman cannot confess even to herself?"

"Truly you exaggerate, my girl; and when one has a lover — "

"When one has one lover," retorted the hairdresser, "one does not act the same as when one has two."

This reply closed the abbé's mouth. It was, in fact, a rude blow for a jealous man; but woman generally prefer to deal with such by brutality rather than by persuasion.

The abbé sighed.

"Why does she have two lovers, then?" said he, gloomily.

"Pshaw! I thought you were a clever man," said the hairdresser; "but I see you are an idiot like all the rest."

"Oh, one does really get tired at last."

"Monsieur l'Abbé, I warn you that you are becoming intolerable. Pray remember the beginning of all this."

"Ah!"

"What did you ask for then? — a simple act of charity, nothing more."

"Well, I don't deny it."

"To-day it is that no longer; to-day you make demands, and you are amazed!"

"Why has she another lover?"

"Great God! what has that to do with you? Attend to your own affairs."

"That 's what I am doing, I should say."

"Yes, in a way to ruin them forever."

"How so?"

"*Pardieu!* you will weary her, and she will dismiss you."

"Ah, indeed!"

"She will be bored to death."

"But I simply tell her of my love; how can it bore her to listen? I ask no more than that."

"No more than that? Really, you are very moderate in your demands! Of course she will listen to you, but not here, — not in Monsieur Bannière's house, not in that room where everything recalls her spring-time of love, not upon that sofa where she has dreamed so many times of the poetic King Hérode."

"Pshaw! Does she dream of Monsieur de Mailly too, I wonder?"

"Ah, now you are an ungrateful, ugly beast! The idea of your reproaching the poor woman with her lovers when she has been kind enough not to turn you out of doors!"

"That 's true, I am wrong"

"Ah, I 'm very glad that you admit it."

"Come, what will you say to her?"

"I? Nothing."

"Will you not speak to her of my grief?"

"Never."

"Then how shall we be reconciled?"

"That remains to be seen."

"Will it be soon?"

"If you are sensible."

"What must I do to be sensible?"

"Be governed by circumstances, and above all by the locality. Here you are Monsieur l'Abbé d'Hoirac calling upon Mademoiselle Olympe, mistress of none but Monsieur Bannière. Do you understand me?"

"Indeed, only too well! But you must agree that this is an extraordinary state of things beyond anything ever known."

"Bah! if you were not near-sighted, you would have seen other things much more extraordinary than this, and would n't be surprised at anything."

"It may be so. But you are interested in me, are n't you?"

"I should think so! If I were not interested in you, do you suppose I would preach to you as I do?"

"Well, then, make my peace with Olympe as soon as possible."

"When do you wish it to be,—this 'soon as possible'?"

"To-morrow, my girl."

"*Peste!* you are in a hurry!"

"I am in a fever, you see."

"Very well, then, to-morrow. I will do my best; but it is difficult."

"Here are twenty louis."

"Yes, I will do my best."

"Oh!" cried the abbé, "when you speak like that, I could embrace you."

"If I were only more attractive."

"Bah! I am near-sighted."

"That is to say that you are an impertinent scamp."

"Do you think so?"

"Yes; but I forgive you because I should n't want you to be seen embracing me."

Saying this with a bitterness which she tried in vain to conceal, the hairdresser dismissed the abbé, who went out by the little door.

The human mind is so strangely constituted that the abbé when he went away was better pleased with the incident than if it had resulted according to his wishes.

So, instead of returning home, he went and woke up Jacob, and bought from him, among other jewels, Monsieur de Mailly's famous ring, which Bannière had filched from Olympe and sold to the worthy Israelite.

XXVIII.

THE ANNIVERSARY OF "HÉRODE AND MARIAMNE."

THE hairdresser kept her word to the Abbé d'Hoirac.

All hands were so much interested in having the clandestine meetings begin again, that the spurious Olympe's severity could not long endure.

The following evening a commissioner came to the abbé's domicile with a message which he could but understand; it was the key of the mysterious house which, by the terms of the treaty, he left in the door after every interview, so that they might have the pleasure of sending it to him again.

The abbé, having made his preparations, arrived ten minutes before the appointed time, his heart swelling with joy.

He was compelled to wait until the hour struck, when the rustling of a silk dress on the floor announced the arrival of her whom he was so impatiently awaiting.

To dart toward her, gain possession of a plump, cool hand, slip upon the finger the ring purchased from the Jew, fasten his lips upon it, and sue for pardon, — such was the abbé's preamble.

The conversation turned upon the episode of the preceding evening, La Catalane of course having been thoroughly posted by her accomplice as to all that had taken place. So the false Olympe, almost as well informed as if she had been the person she claimed to be, reproached the abbé in the most natural way for having conducted himself most unworthily, and explained

to him that in that house — that is to say, under Monsieur Bannière's roof — certain subjects of conversation were prohibited which were perfectly legitimate in their present location, — that is to say, under the roof of Monsieur d'Hoirac.

Thus made acquainted with the details of his wrongdoing, the abbé appreciated its enormity, and admitted it, asked pardon for it once more, and obtained it.

He had very good reasons to give too.

"I needed some balm," he said, "for the suffering caused by separation. To speak to Olympe only in secret, in utter darkness, and in a strange house, could hardly be called the summit of earthly bliss, could it?"

It was suggested that light and darkness were as one to his defective vision.

He replied that he would waive his demurrer to the darkness, but that the matter of separation was another affair.

The false Olympe exclaimed at the word "separation."

But the abbé's wit was keen; he retorted that there was a physical and a moral separation, and that the latter variety was the most painful of all.

A little laugh was the only reply.

"Is n't that true?" asked the abbé.

"Oh, no, by no means!"

"What! this Monsieur Bannière, this absolute master, this unworthy master —"

"Let's hear no more about Monsieur Bannière, I beg, at Monsieur d'Hoirac's, than I hear of Monsieur d'Hoirac at Monsieur Bannière's."

"But I shall rebel finally!" cried the abbé. "So when you are in that house, you love this Monsieur Bannière? Upon my word, I shall be compelled to get rid of him."

"I do not love him, you know very well," was the soft reply.

"In that case," retorted the abbé, "why not break with him altogether?"

"Oh, there, there! we shall come to that."

"Yes, and meanwhile I am dying."

"You are a trifle impatient."

"Is n't it natural?"

"No; for if I listened to you, it would be necessary to turn the poor boy out."

"What does that matter, if you no longer love him?"

"For shame!"

"I am jealous."

"What! now, you ungrateful wretch?"

"I don't say that I am at this moment; but I shall be to-morrow, or as soon as I am no longer with you."

"What must I do, pray?"

"This: promise me that you will treat this Bannière so contemptuously that he will feel that you no longer love him."

"That 's easy enough to do. There! does that satisfy you? Do you feel better?"

"Yes; but later, I shall be less tolerant."

"Oh! oh!"

"Because I shall be still more in love."

"Very well, then!"

But this promise was no sooner made by the false Olympe than the true one hastened to break it, as we shall see.

While the affairs of La Catalane and the abbé were going forward thus, the affairs of Olympe and Bannière were proceeding as usual,—that is to say, with considerable irregularity. Olympe had given up catechising Bannière; but he had not given up loving Olympe, nor struggling

to retain her love, so that from time to time after he had driven her to despair he would still succeed in arousing her love or her indulgence again, obstinate as she was.

Olympe's obstinacy, in fact, was all on the surface; at bottom her disposition was kind and yielding. Kindness is strength in man, but weakness in woman.

So it happened, after La Catalane had entered into an engagement with the abbé that Olympe should never be sufficiently demonstrative of affection for Bannière to arouse the jealousy of her other adorer, that Olympe and Bannière, who had not been let into the secret, executed a new lease of love in token of the anniversary of the first performance of "King Hérode."

The unlucky abbé happened to drop in upon the two lovers just at the dessert stage of the feast which they were giving in honor of their love.

The feast had been prolonged because Olympe did not act that evening, — La Catalane was creating a new part; so that, as if everything had been arranged in advance to bring about a catastrophe, the hairdresser was at the theatre to attend to her professional duties.

D'Hoirac, then, made his appearance at Olympe's door at a time when he was least expected after what had taken place two evenings before.

It must be said that he, on his side, was not expecting to find what he found there.

At that hour Monsieur Bannière was almost always at the card-table. The abbé knew that every event has its anniversary, but he did not know of the anniversary of this great event in the lives of Olympe and Bannière.

Entering the house with his customary heedlessness (the lovers too had been heedless enough to leave the key in the door), the abbé started to walk through a mirror in the anteroom which he took for a door, and in

which he saw the reflection of Olympe and Bannière, a glass of champagne in the hand of each.

The abbè stood as if stupefied, staring at this tableau.

A single servant, whose attendance they had dispensed with, was picking over the remains of the feast in the kitchen.

The abbé, in a towering rage at what he had seen in the mirror, turned upon his heel, and rushed into the dining-room, not as if impelled by friendly interest, but like a jealous madman, — like a master and not a visitor.

He made a noise with his voice and a noise with the doors, and appeared before the two lovers like Calchas, with pale face and hair on end.

At this apparition Olympe and Bannière, whom the anniversary and the champagne had combined to put in high good-humor, uttered exclamations of unbounded surprise in different keys, and followed them up with roars of laughter, which raised the abbé's wrath and confusion to the highest possible point. Surely such cruel mystification was never before visited upon a man so deeply in love as the abbé, and who had been so thoroughly reassured by the interview of the preceding evening.

So he turned again and made for the door with clinched teeth, and revolving in his brain all sorts of projects of vengeance, — projects which had no form or coherence in the chaos of his rage, but which might well be ground into shape by the mill of reflection.

But just as he was putting out his hand to seize the knob, Bannière stepped in ahead of him, and took him by the hand.

"Come, come," said he, "are you so unworldly that you are scandalized by the sight of a happy lover at the side of his beloved?"

D'Hoirac shivered from head to foot; he awaited a word from Olympe.

"Oh!" said she, "Monsieur l'Abbé cannot have any great horror of a happiness which he knows by experience, I fancy."

"Come, my dear," said Bannière, "see if you cannot make our peace with Monsieur d'Hoirac."

And, having exchanged a significant glance with Olympe, he went out, leaving her alone with the abbé in his despair.

His first word was a curse.

"Oh, what infernal wretches women are!" he cried, bringing his hand down heavily upon the table.

Olympe straightened up, as if she herself had received the blow.

"What do you say, Monsieur?" she cried, deeply offended; "is it for my ears that you speak thus?"

"For whose ears should I speak, pray," snarled the abbé "if not for yours?"

"You forget yourself then, I think."

"I do not forget myself; I am in a rage."

"Indeed!" said Olympe, contemptuously, "you are having another attack of madness, apparently."

"Madness, if you choose to call it so! Yes, madness, but ungovernable madness; so beware!"

He struck a second blow upon the table.

"Look out, Abbé," said Olympe, "or you will break the table and the glasses."

"Oh, yes; lovely trifles! One can buy new tables and glasses with money, but nothing will buy back the derided love and the lost illusions of a man of honor."

"Do you know," said Olympe, frowning angrily, "that I fail to understand a single word of all this nonsense, Monsieur?"

"Oh, have done with your dignity, Madame, or rather with your comedy, which consists in putting a gag in my mouth when I undertake to complain."

"You complain! complain of what, I pray to know?"

"What did you promise me? Tell me that."

"I?"

"Yes; had n't I the right to rely upon you?"

"Do you mean to say that I promised you anything?"

"I know what reply you will make; I know very well that here I am not on my own premises, but on Monsieur Bannière's."

"That 's very true."

"But you must agree that patience has a limit; and my anger — "

"Your anger! Monsieur," interrupted Olympe, "your anger will eventually arouse mine; and when our two angers are face to face, I warn you of one thing, and that is that mine will request yours to leave the house."

"Madame," said the abbé, raising his voice, "you break your promises; permit me to remind you of them."

"Do so, I beg you, Monsieur; remind me of them, and you will greatly oblige me."

"You permit me to do it then?"

"I beg you to."

"Well, then, was it not agreed that you should never give me reason to be jealous?"

"Jealous! you! and of whom?"

"What!" cried the abbé, lowering his head, and stretching out his arms; "I find you *tête-à-tête* here with M. Bannière."

"my soul," cried Olympe, as if speaking to
e man is mad!"

ou forget so quickly," said the abbé, passing

from hot wrath to melancholy, "oh, I foresee a world of misery!"

Olympe shrugged her shoulders; it was clear that the abbé's melancholy was as insane as his anger.

"The other day," said she, "it was the maraschino; but to-day there really is no excuse whatever."

The abbé turned toward her with hands clasped.

"Come now, Olympe, be serious."

"Olympe!" cried the young woman, leaping to her feet; "you call me Olympe? — you!"

"Ah, indeed, this is too much!" shrieked the abbé, whose face was absolutely colorless, from having contained or rather devoured himself so long. "To the devil with your shilly-shallying, your agreements, and your conscientious scruples! I throw them all over, since you are so prompt to forget your word. Yes, here I am on Monsieur Bannière's preserve, it is true; but since you force me to it, I will speak here as I speak at the other place."

"The other place! what do you mean by 'the other place'?"

"Oh, yes, play the innocent, Madame; but this time I will not leave you till I have told you the whole truth to your face."

"What 'other place,' Monsieur?" Olympe again demanded.

"That other place where Monsieur d'Hoirac is on his own premises, Madame; that other place where you reverse Penelope's process, and put together in the evening what you unravel here in the day; that other place where I am weak enough to love the one who deceives me everywhere else."

Olympe uttered a cry which told of violent wrath to come, — a cry like that of a wounded lioness.

It warned the abbé that he had gone too far perhaps; so he passed from threats to suggestions of compromise.

"Come, come," said he; "the time has come for us to speak with perfect frankness. Let us adopt a course which will release us from this equivocal position; let us play with our cards upon the table, — no more ambiguity."

"Yes, that 's it, with cards on the table," said Olympe, listening intently to see how far this insane freak would carry him.

"Very well! I have behaved like a miser, have I not?"

"On what occasion, pray?"

"You are not satisfied with what I have given you?"

"What does that mean?" said she. "You seem to be passing from insolence to indecency."

"One moment," said the abbé; "come, dear Olympe, let us talk business once for all, never to recur to the subject again, and our love will run the smoother for it."

Without taking alarm at the horrified looks of Olympe, which by the way he could not see, perhaps, on account of his bad eyes, he continued, —

"I suggest, then, that you have discovered that you have not enough of that which the hairdresser has asked of me in your name."

"The hairdresser — in my name!" And Olympe took her head in her hands, as if it were she who was going mad.

"Oh, don't interrupt me, please!" cried the abbé; "I know all that you would say; but I, as well as you, must have positive assurances. Let us agree upon them together, with equal advantages. Here are the articles which I propose — "

Olympe had made up her mind to listen to the end; she wished to get to the bottom once for all of this

extraordinary mental aberration, which persisted in representing itself to her as a real conviction.

"Well," said she, falling back in her chair, "let 's see the articles."

"Article first: you will leave the stage —"

"I — I leave the stage?"

"Just wait."

"I am waiting, as you see. Only hurry up, for I may not have the patience to wait very long."

"You will leave the stage, because your life, so long as it belongs to the public, does not belong to your lover."

Olympe folded her arms as if to confine her wrath within her breast.

"Now," the abbé went on, "once you have ceased to be on the stage, nothing will be easier than to leave the other."

"The other?" repeated Olympe, more astounded than ever. "Who? what other?"

"What? No need to name him, my dear. Is n't he back of all our thoughts, — the wretch?"

"The other, the other, who is back of all our thoughts? Look here, my dear abbé, upon my word you will end by frightening me. Pray, is this a regular joke of yours, to play the madman thus? For my own part, I warn you that I am terribly afraid of madmen; so if you have a variety of jokes, please select some other, and don't go any farther with this one."

"But I am not joking; I — I am — Well, let us pass to article second."

"Go on."

"Article second: the other to be dismissed; we will give him a pension —"

Olympe moved uneasily.

"With a memorandum, drawn up by a notary, something like this: 'Monsieur Bannière shall receive annually —'"

Olympe clapped her hands.

"Aha!" said she, bursting into laughter; "ah, this is delightful! So Bannière is 'the other,' is he?"

"*It is thou who hast named him!*" replied the abbé.

"Monsieur, I prefer that you should not 'thee and thou' me, even when quoting Monsieur Racine's lines," said she, her nostrils dilating with all the pride of her nature, and all the wrath she had been nursing, since the interview began, in her scornful, irritated heart.

"Article three," the abbé went on: "you to receive yourself two thousand louis cash to settle all outstanding debts, and any forfeitures you may incur; and in addition a stipulated income of six thousand livres charged upon the estate of D'Hoirac, which was entailed upon me by my late father."

Olympe walked straight up to the abbé.

"The man who prates thus of money," said she, "is not so mad, after all. This bargain you are giving me the figures on,— who is the object of it? Myself, am I not?"

"Why, yes."

"It is myself whom you wish to purchase, then?"

"And to pay for; that is to say, if one ever can pay for an inestimable treasure."

"And you will pay in advance?" she asked ironically; "are n't you afraid of being cheated?"

"Oh, with the promises you have made me," said the abbé, "I don't see that I have anything to fear."

The words were scarcely out of his mouth when two doors were thrown open simultaneously.

One was the door of the cabinet, directly opposite the abbé.

Bannière emerged with livid countenance and trembling lips.

The other was the door of the anteroom.

The hairdresser appeared there, in dire dismay; for two words had been enough to explain the whole situation to her.

XXIX.

IN WHICH THE ABBÉ JUST MISSES BECOMING REALLY MAD.

THE abbé was evidently thunderstruck at Bannière's appearance; his short-sighted eyes were equal to the task of observing the change which had taken place in his face, and the signs that a tempest was imminent.

He had no time to explain away his words.

"Monsieur l'Abbé," said Bannière, hardly able to produce an intelligible sound, so tight a grasp had anger taken with its iron hand upon his throat, "do you happen to remember that I once broke a guitar over your head?"

The abbé gnashed his teeth at the reminder.

"You do, do you not?" continued Bannière; "and yet at that time you were guilty of nothing worse than dinning wretched music into Madame's ears."

"Monsieur!"

"Calm yourself,— I should say, reserve your wrath for another time; I will give you an opportunity to vent it before long. This time, Monsieur, it is not music which you have forced Olympe to listen to, it is an insult."

"An insult?"

"Yes, a veritable, well-rounded insult. Oh, I heard it all."

The abbé put his hand to his hip in true knightly fashion.

"I will show you what it is," said he, "to listen behind doors."

"Madame knows very well," retorted Bannière, "that I have not been listening behind the door, because I have been to the theatre to see La Catalane in a new part and report how she played it. Having returned sooner than I expected, I heard loud voices, and in spite of myself overheard the offer you have dared to make to Madame."

"I do not feel insulted by such a trifle," said Olympe, who saw an angry flush rising in the abbé's face, and who knew that the best way for a woman to defend the man she loves is to take his side openly, — a manœuvre which always disconcerts the enemy.

"You do not feel insulted, Olympe," said Bannière, "because you are perfection itself; but I am insulted, I take the insult to myself, and I inform Monsieur l'Abbé that on two occasions his cloth has saved him from my wrath; but I would not answer for myself another time, and to spare him so great a calamity, and myself so great cause for regret, I beg Monsieur l'Abbé to keep away from my house in future."

The abbé thought he saw his chance. He was too bitterly humiliated not to have lost his head entirely; he fancied that this woman, of whose affection he felt assured, would not dare to turn against him for fear that he might compromise her by tearing off her mask.

This was not a generous idea, and it was the poor abbé's ruin.

"Madame," said he, "Monsieur Bannière speaks of his house. Are you not under your own roof here?"

"Yes, Monsieur," said Olympe.

"Madame, is it not true that, having been once forbidden this house, on account of the ungovernable passion

and bad taste of Monsieur Bannière, I was invited here again by yourself? Tell me, pray."

Bannière opened his eyes in alarm. He feared that he was about to hear something that boded ill for his passion.

The two men were really hanging upon the lips of this woman whose dominion over both was unbounded.

Olympe smiled, for she saw the trap, and began to despise the abbé. Addressing her words to him, she replied composedly, —

"It is true, Monsieur, that I thought you a gentleman; it is true that I was sorry to see your friendship, which was a little exacting but honorable nevertheless, in danger of changing to hatred, which your high standing would have made a real misfortune to me; it is true, in short, that I committed the error, through being too tender-hearted, of interesting myself in soothing your touchy disposition, of pardoning your acts of folly, and finally of reopening my doors to you, after Monsieur Bannière had very justly closed them upon you."

"The error, Madame!" cried the abbé, who was sufficiently sure of eventual triumph to cavil about words and haggle over the phraseology of the apologies which he expected.

"I said THE ERROR," repeated Olympe, "and I will add the *unpardonable* error, for I can never forgive myself for it."

"Go on," said the abbé, roughly, for his hopes were based upon what was coming next.

"Very well, Monsieur," and Olympe's brows contracted: "I go on, and conclude by begging you to comply with the orders of Monsieur Bannière, who is master here."

"You understand that Monsieur Bannière shows me the door?"

"Precisely."

"And, consequently, you do the same, — you!" shrieked the abbé, beside himself with rage.

"Even more firmly than he," replied Olympe.

"Madame!" cried D'Hoirac, making ready to reinforce his *Tu quoque* with a *Quos ego*.

He stepped, with an insulting toss of the head, toward the door.

But there he found the hairdresser lying in wait for him; and she put her hand over his mouth, and hurried him away with an amount of zeal which touched Olympe, but seemed somewhat equivocal to Bannière.

Notwithstanding the presence of the hand upon his mouth the abbé tried hard to speak.

"Keep quiet, for heaven's sake, you blind fool!" hissed the hairdresser in his ear, "or you are lost forever."

"What, the devil! I want to explain," said he, struggling to free himself.

"Well, well, you can explain later."

"At the other place?"

"Yes."

D'Hoirac, confused, giddy, and cast down, suffered himself to be led to the door, like Harlequin surprised with Isabelle.

During the entire distance to his own home he was muttering between his teeth, —

"*Morbleu!* I will give the man who will fathom that woman a hundred thousand crowns and a magician's certificate."

Meanwhile Olympe, proud of her own performance, went up to Bannière and offered to kiss him as soon as the door closed behind the abbé.

But Bannière repulsed her; then, throwing himself into his chair, he said, —

"Come! I have had enough of doubt and consequent suffering; there must be an end of this."

"Why, the end has come, I should say," said Olympe.

"Far from it!" cried Bannière; "for something has just begun to which all the powers of the earth will not reconcile me."

"What do you mean?"

"Olympe!"

"Well?"

"You invited that abbé, when I had forbidden him the house, to come here again?"

"I have admitted it."

"Yes, when you were driven to it, when you had no way of avoiding it."

"Do you suspect me, pray?"

"Do I suspect you, Madame! It seems to me that words have been uttered here which give me the right to do so."

"What has been said? Repeat the words."

"It was said, Madame, while I was listening unseen, that you have received presents from Monsieur l'Abbé d'Hoirac."

"Call him back, and make him tell you what presents I have received."

"Useless!"

"Why useless?"

"Why? Because I prefer doubt to certainty," said Bannière, in a tone of utter despondency.

"Oh, indeed! you prefer doubt, do you?" said Olympe, with bitter sarcasm; "thanks, you are very good!"

"Ah!" said Bannière, "I am not like him or like you: I am not a patrician accustomed to deal with patricians; I am not Venus, accustomed to being worshipped."

"I don't understand you. What do you mean?"

"I mean that I have not passed from the hands of one prince to those of another of the same kind."

"Beware, Monsieur Bannière," said Olympe, with the pride of a queen, "for you are dangerously near insulting me yourself."

"Yes, you are right, Olympe; yes, I am only 'Monsieur Bannière,' nothing more than the dust which can be destroyed with a breath; yes, I am the culprit, escaped from the convent at Avignon; I am the fugitive who, on Père Mordon's mandate, may be cast into a dungeon, as a vagabond, and guilty of sacrilege and apostasy. Oh, do not heap any further insults upon me, poor, abandoned wretch that I am, who have, or had, nothing under heaven but your love! Oh, do not cast me off, for without you you know well that I am lost; you know that I will go and give myself up to those who are seeking me; you know that, deprived of you, I will cast myself into the arms of death, — my last and sole remaining love, who will surely not deceive me!"

"Hush, you madman!" cried Olympe, rising hastily and placing her hand upon Bannière's mouth. "Suppose any one should overhear you! Are you insane to shout in that way!"

She ran to the door and opened it, to see if any one was in a position to have overheard that unfortunate disclosure.

But she saw no one; she only heard a door close at the foot of the stairs. She was uneasy about it, and was about to make inquiries.

"Don't take that trouble," said Bannière. "You have only one means of saving me."

"What is that?"

"Oh, *mon Dieu!* it is to tell me that you love me."

"You have but one way to make me love you, and that is never to doubt me."

"Let me tell you the truth, then."

"Say on."

"Don't be angry, for your eyes when you are angry are flames which set despair alight in my heart."

"Never fear, I will not be angry; go on quickly."

"Well, then, this man, who tried to bargain for your love, said that he had received an acknowledgment that he had won it."

"Yes, he did say so; but he lies."

"Swear it."

"Upon what?"

"Upon something sacred, upon something in which you have faith."

"I swear to you that he lies," said Olympe, "upon my mother's honor."

"But why did he say it, then, believing you to be alone with him? Why did he act out that comedy with you, with himself?"

"I have no idea."

"Oh, there is a mystery under all this which somebody must be able to elucidate."

"Who?"

"Question your hairdresser."

"My hairdresser?"

"Yes, a woman capable of anything."

"Do you think so?"

"Yes, I assure you that it is so. She is a friend of La Catalane, your deadly enemy. You discharged this woman?"

"Yes, I did."

"Why did you take her back, in God's name?"

"How can I tell! Why does one ever do evil, believ-

ing one's self to be doing good? But these are things which I would rather not suspect even; it is time thrown away. The abbé has gone; let it rest at that. The hairdresser is here, — do you want me to turn her away again?"

"I cannot deny myself that satisfaction."

Olympe rang, and the man-servant appeared.

"The hairdresser?" Olympe asked.

"Madame, she has this moment gone out," the man replied.

"Was it not she who closed the door at the foot of the stairway?"

"Yes, Madame."

"Where was she coming from then?"

"I think that she came from Madame's apartments."

Olympe and Bannière exchanged an anxious glance.

"You may go," Olympe said to the servant.

"She was listening," said Bannière, when they were alone once more.

"Yes; and why should she have listened?"

"On account of our quarrel."

"Alas! we quarrel so often that that alone can no longer interest any one," replied Olympe; "but no matter, — the hairdresser will end her service here this evening, since you wish it."

"No, no! I no longer wish anything; absolutely that is so! I am mad with love, you see, — mad because I am poor, and a burden to you. I would give my life for one year with a hundred thousand livres at my disposal."

"Don't gamble any more then, for you always lose. Hoard up what you have already lost, and what you will lose if you keep on, and in that way, *mon Dieu!* you will soon have something much better than the hundred

thousand livres; you will have peace of mind due to the certainty of my love, and then you will be rich indeed, for I shall owe my happiness to you."

As she said these words, Olympe kissed Bannière so fondly that the abbé if he had been present would surely have died of rage.

XXX.

WHEREIN IT IS DEMONSTRATED THAT THE HAIRDRESSER HAD OVERHEARD EVERYTHING.

But the abbé could not see; he was running with all the strength of his little legs.

The hairdresser, too, was doing her best in the same line, and she arrived at the domicile of La Catalane in a state of breathless excitement.

The actress started up as she saw her.

"All is lost!" the hairdresser began.

La Catalane fairly leaped into the air.

"How is that?" she demanded.

"That Bannière has kicked the abbé out of the house."

"Well, what then?"

"What then?"

"Yes."

"It is impossible that there should not be a clear and unequivocal explanation between Olympe and the abbé, and it may come at any moment."

"Never! if we use our wits."

"How can we prevent it, I should like to know?"

"It 's a very simple matter: there is only one way in which the abbé can really be undeceived, and that is to see me in the light when I impersonate Olympe at the little house. That way he may adopt, if he has any suspicions, and then we should really be lost. So from this time we must decide not to receive the abbé there any more,— no more traces; nothing can ever be discov-

ered. It will be in vain that Olympe will struggle and deny and rage, D'Hoirac will not believe her innocent."

"Yes, but he will bring me into it too," said the hairdresser. "He will call upon me for my evidence, and I shall have to give it."

"Very well! you give your evidence, and it is that which ruins Olympe."

"Yes? and how, pray?"

"Oh, pshaw! that's very difficult, is n't it? You will maintain that you hired the house for Olympe; you will swear that Olympe has been there, and you will be believed,—for scandal is always believed, especially when it concerns actresses."

The hairdresser shook her head.

"We shall get ourselves into trouble," said she.

"Bah! have you trusted our secret to any one?"

"I? Never!"

"Are you afraid of Olympe, then?"

"No; but I am afraid of Bannière."

"What do you think he 'll do to you?"

"Bannière? He will kill me!"

"Oh, no! I will wheedle him so that I shall appear a veritable Minerva in his eyes from the moment that he believes Olympe guilty."

"He will kill me, I tell you, and you with me."

"Bah! we will make the abbé defend us."

"He will kill the abbé too."

"You think so?"

"Oh, you don't know him," said the hairdresser, thoughtfully.

"Why, is he such a terrible fellow, this Bannière?"

"Oh, indeed he is!"

"Dear boy!"

"Listen to me," said the hairdresser; "this is no time

to joke. You propose to satisfy a caprice, and give yourself the pleasure of robbing Olympe of a lover; that 's about your idea, is n't it? "

" To be sure."

" Well, the abbé is the only one you will steal from her? "

" Why so? "

" It is written that Bannière will not play Olympe false."

" Again I ask you, why? "

" Because if you do not ruin the man, I will ruin him myself."

" What do you mean by ruining him? "

" Well! imagine this."

" Imagine what? "

" That I know a secret about him which is sufficiently compromising to make him disappear."

" Oho! Has he been cheating at play? "

" Better than that."

" Tell me quickly."

" No, you are too fond of him. I will attend to my matters myself."

" What do you mean? Do you propose to ruin the poor fellow? "

" Yes, and at once; for if I don't do it to-night, he will wring my neck to-morrow, and I object to that."

" You are frightened at nothing."

" Let me tell you how things will turn out. At this very moment, either I am an old fool, or Olympe and Bannière are reconciled. To-morrow the abbé will make his peace with Bannière. Men are always like that; when you think they are hacking at one another's throats, they are hugging one another."

" That 's true enough."

"Well, then, Bannière and the abbé being reconciled, I shall be sacrificed; the abbé is rich and powerful, and will have me sent to the workhouse."

"That would be no more than right."

"You, in the mean time, will have pocketed the profits. More than that, when I am safely in the workhouse, you will find some way of making up with Bannière too. Women are always like that; when one thinks them friends, they are lovers."

"Upon my word, I had no idea you were such a moralizer. Have you, by chance, any of Monsieur de La Rochefoucauld's blood in your veins?"

"No; but, failing that, I have invented something else to prevent my being victimized, and in its execution you may assist me, if you please."

"What is it?"

"You will assist me, or I will do it by myself."

"State your wishes, my girl, go on."

"The abbé is going to call upon the counterfeit Olympe."

"Oho! you didn't tell me that, and I am *en déshabillé*."

"Make your toilet. He will come in a furious rage with you for having allowed Bannière to turn him out."

"I will soothe him."

"Eleven o'clock is just striking; he will be there at half-past."

"Do you think so?"

"I am sure of it."

"*Peste!* we have no more than time enough. Help me to dress, pray."

"Come, come! let us go into your dressing-room, and listen to me. You are about to learn the secret of my method of arranging matters, so that in three hours you

will have two thousand louis more, and I one Bannière less."

They entered the cabinet, and the door closed upon them, preventing us from hearing their paltry plotting and indecent schemes upon the purse and the honor of their enemies.

XXXI.

WHAT ONE RECEIVES FOR FORTY-EIGHT THOUSAND LIVRES WHEN ONE DOES BUSINESS IN THE DARK AND IS NEAR-SIGHTED.

THE abbé, promptly on hand at the time appointed, though he was in a furious rage, had not long to wait for the spurious Olympe.

As for that damsel, she made her appearance just as she was on all other days, wasting but little anxiety on the storm of reproaches which Monsieur d'Hoirac had in store for her.

"Ah!" he cried, when he heard the door open, "at last the moment has arrived to take my revenge for all the affronts which the most perfidious of women has made me endure."

La Catalane stopped at the threshold of the room where he was waiting, and asked calmly, —

"What affronts?"

"Why, those which I swallowed this evening, wretched woman!"

"Where?"

"At your house."

"At Monsieur Bannière's, that is to say."

"Oh, the devil!" cried the abbé, seeing the drift of her words; "there you go again intrenching yourself behind that paltry rampart of the distinction between Monsieur Bannière's house and Monsieur d'Hoirac's."

"That is my fortress."

"I know that well enough, *parbleu!*"

"There was a certain treaty signed, if I remember."

"Yes; but there were other stipulations, too, which you violated."

"You refer to the affection which Monsieur Bannière so often shows me?"

"Well, what have you to say on that score?" said the abbé, with redoubled fury.

"Nothing."

"What! Nothing?"

"No, nothing, except that I could not prevent him."

"What! You could not prevent him, in my presence?"

"Is it my fault? Poor boy! He doesn't know of your rights, and thinks he has some of his own."

"It is outrageous, I tell you, and I will not put up with such torture any longer."

"Quite right, too, Monsieur l'Abbé."

"Ah, indeed! that's very lucky."

"So I have made this appointment to see you for the last time."

"What! the last time!" exclaimed the abbé.

"To be sure."

"Then I am a dupe?"

"How so?"

"Why, because when you have to choose between Bannière the actor and Monsieur l'Abbé d'Hoirac, you choose Monsieur Bannière."

"*Dame!*"

"And so, after having abandoned everything to me, you take it all back again."

"But your persistent importunity, Monsieur?"

"My importunity is that of a man whose love is increased by every hour that passes. Oh, you have never been jealous, that's very plain."

"Pray, what am I to do to satisfy you?" asked La Catalane, with a woe-begone expression.

"If you can find in your heart no means of satisfying me, I have nothing more to say."

"What!" cried the false Olympe, "do you think it is so easy in this world to reconcile one's inclination with one's true renown?"

"Your renown! Why, Madame," said the abbé, somewhat reassured, "do you not consider that it is as glorious to belong to Monsieur d'Hoirac as to Monsieur Bannière?"

"Oh, of course; but —"

"Everything that you can say is a pitiful reason, Madame. If you loved that man a little less, and me a little more —"

La Catalane pretended to weep.

To the abbé's mind it was Olympe who was shedding these tears, yet he did not waver.

"You ought to understand one thing," said he.

"What is that?"

"That I am at the end of my patience."

The impostor's sobs were heart-breaking. One of the great points of La Catalane's dramatic power was her ability to weep to order.

"Come, come! what's the matter?" said the abbé, beginning to be a little touched.

"Why, you can see, Monsieur, that I am weeping."

"Weep if you please, but come to some decision."

"Oh, it's all decided, Monsieur, — on your part at least. Leave me, leave the woman who has given up everything to you, as you said just now."

"Leave you, leave you! I know very well that it is your wish that I should leave you," said the abbé, gradually assuming the defensive.

"My wish?"

"Yes, to be sure. Indeed, this whole scene you are favoring me with is the result of a mere whim."

"A whim?"

"I mean it."

"Does poor Bannière deprive you of anything more to-day than yesterday?"

"Indeed he does; for he deprives me of the faith I had in you."

"Oh, indeed," said La Catalane, "if you have lost faith in me, I am most unhappy."

And her tears flowed more freely than ever, with a running accompaniment of sobs.

The abbé held his tongue.

"Well," she cried, "what do you order me to do?"

He approached her in order to soothe and cure her wounded pride with the balm of affectionate pardon, but she pushed him away.

"Oh, no," said she, "you are a hard-hearted wretch."

"And you — are you not as hard-hearted, yes, a hundred and a thousand times more than I?"

"Oh!" cried La Catalane; "pray understand this, — that I choose to deal with a friend and not a tyrant."

"Speak, then."

"No; it is for you to dictate your terms, since you came for that purpose, and I will see whether I ought to accept them; I will see whether I am dealing with a man who really loves me, or a man who simply claims to dictate every act and word of my life."

"God forbid!"

"And yet — "

"Why, you know very well that your pleasure is my only happiness."

She shook her head in the darkness; but the abbé divined the gesture.

"You have proved it to me so many times, haven't you?" said she.

"Your pleasure, then, consists in having that actor caress you in my presence," cried the abbé, with renewed irritation.

"Oh, you are a spiteful fool," La Catalane retorted, "and you don't know what you are saying."

"But I should say that I saw it."

"Saw it?"

"Yes, saw it."

"Nonsense! you saw nothing of the kind."

The abbé leaped up from his sofa.

"Well, upon my soul, that 's a little too much!" he cried.

"No, you saw nothing," continued La Catalane; "otherwise you would adore me at this moment."

"That 's a good one too. I did not see him showering kisses upon your cheeks? I did not see him pressing you to his heart? Oh, no, I saw nothing of all that!"

"No; for if you had seen it, you would also have seen all the signs I was making to you, and all the smiles I was lavishing upon you, to induce you to take the fooling patiently."

"I saw nothing of all that; at all events, that is not what you promised me."

"Well, and did you promise to come and offer me, in 'stand and deliver' fashion, two thousand louis, and six thousand livres a year? Did you promise me that during all your fond speeches and your interesting proposals, while you were pressing my fingers and kneeling devoutly at my feet, Monsieur Bannière, green with jealousy, would be hidden in the next room? Did you promise me that from that point he would hear every word you said,

and see everything you did? In short, did you promise to bring this horrible lesson upon yourself, and this disagreeable scene upon me?"

"You ought to have warned me," said he, somewhat mollified.

"But what did I do, blind bat that you are?"

"Do you mean to say that you warned me?"

"I mean that I nearly broke my jawbone muttering cautions to you; I dislocated the arch of my eyebrows rolling my eyes at you; my toe is all black from kicking against your chair to keep you from coming too near."

"And I saw nothing of it!"

"You are the stupidest or the blindest of mortals. Everything that has gone wrong has been through your fault."

"Alas!"

"Yes, and now groan,— that 's very nice; reproach me, — that 's very kind. And I meanwhile am suffering keenly."

"You are suffering?"

"Can you doubt it? Do you imagine that after you had gone, Bannière did not give me a fine dressing down? Do you think he is deaf and blind like you? If he is deaf and blind, he has n't lost the use of his arms, I can tell you."

"Oh, *mon Dieu!* did he threaten you?

"Threaten, indeed! You are very good! He beat me."

"Beat you? — my poor angel, that blackguard beat you?"

"Fortunately he vented his anger upon me, violent though it was. I was terribly afraid, I promise you, that he would take it out of you. He would have killed you on the spot. He 's a violent fellow."

"Thank God! I have arms."

"Yes, but no eyes; whereas he has arms and eyes and a sword."

"Do you think I 'm afraid of him?"

"Oh, no, I don't think you 're cowardly. Besides, you are not exposed to the danger; I 'm the one."

"I will protect you. Ah! you shrug your shoulders."

"*Parbleu!* begin by protecting yourself."

"My dear, you seem to forget what I am."

"I do not forget, but I know also that your cloth requires you to adopt many precautions which a man of the sword might neglect. If you were a dragoon like Monsieur de Mailly, you would give me more confidence with one look than the Abbé d'Hoirac can give with a whole army."

"If I can't avenge myself, I can at least take care of —"

"What pretext have you for injuring an honest man, who is only defending his own property?"

"His property, his property! Why, you 're not his wife."

"No; but I was his mistress."

"He is an actor."

"Well, I am an actress, if you come to that."

"At all events, I don't propose that he shall frighten you and beat you."

"He will care little for anything you can say; and if you cry too loud, he will cry still louder. So much the worse for you then; an actor has nothing at stake compared with an abbé."

"By that reasoning, Madame, it seems that you propose to put up with that fellow forever."

"Oh, no, no!"

"Why not? Why do you say no?"

"Because, you see, I have a way of getting clear of him when he embarrasses me too much."

"Really, then, why don't you put it in operation, for it seems to me that we are pretty seriously embarrassed."

"The devil! he 's so headstrong!"

"Confide it to me."

"Never."

"Then you don't love me? And you propose to subject me forever to the brutality of that villain?"

"I do not say that; but there 's a great difference between simply turning out of doors a man who bores you, and utterly ruining a poor wretch who has trusted in you, and whose secret you know."

"Aha! so there 's a secret."

"A fine one, I tell you!"

"Tell it to your little friend."

"No, no, there are no friends — "

"You deny that I am your only friend, do you?"

"Am I wrong in doing so?"

"It seems to me — "

"Pray what have you done that I should call you my friend? Is it because you are my lover?"

"But — Olympe — "

"That 's no proof at all. A friend is one whose devotion is so absolute that one cannot possibly doubt him."

"I should say that I had given myself to you absolutely."

"Body and goods?"

The abbé rose to the bait.

"As to the body, I have nothing to say. As to worldly goods," said he, "make your demands; I have already put my proposals in due form; I don't know that there is any Bannière in the closet here."

"*Mon Dieu!*" said the spurious Olympe; "that 's a

very delicate and important question to discuss, Monsieur l'Abbé; however a woman must make up her mind some time when her independence is at stake."

"Your independence will never be assured, my dear," said the abbé, quickly, "so long as you live with this Bannière; therefore you would better give him up."

"That point can hardly be considered as at issue between us, Monsieur."

"The question to be settled is whether your apprehension will prove to be stronger than your scruples."

"Precisely."

"Well, then! how about the two thousand louis which I offered you?"

"Oh, how bluntly you talk about money!" said La Catalane, delighted beyond measure.

"I am compelled, in order to induce you to make up your mind, to prove to you that while you will be less pinched for funds, you will be more at liberty. It is essential, too, that you furnish me with the means of depriving Bannière of the power of injuring you which he seems to have; I will use them in case he abuses that power, and in that case only."

"I shall never make up my mind to do that."

"Listen!" said the abbé, becoming more earnest, as he felt her resistance growing less; "if you love me, you will put that man in my power."

"No, no; don't require that."

"You accused me just now of not being your friend; I propose to show you that you are wrong. A friend — I quote your own definition — is one whose devotion is absolute, and includes body and goods, given beyond recall. I am yours, my wealth is yours, and my hand ·ours if I could marry."

talking," said La Catalane.

The abbé proposed to strike the iron while it was hot.

"I have the two thousand louis here in a chest," said he. "I wanted to find out whether you would be as generous as I."

"What do you call generosity, please?"

"I mean that I wanted to find out whether, in consideration of a paltry sum which would assure you comfort, you would consent to leave the stage, and give your whole life to me alone. Here are the two thousand louis; take them, and give me the reward I ask."

The abbé held out the notes to La Catalane, who seized them with eager fingers.

He took advantage of her proximity to steal a kiss, which was not denied him.

When the shameless creature felt this unhoped-for and to her eyes fabulous wealth within her grasp, a strange process took place in her heart; the abbé became dear and sacred to her, while Bannière possessed no further attractions. She pressed the poor dupe to her heart, and in a tone expressive of more real affection than she had ever felt in her life, she said, —

"You have a good heart, and you deserve that I should do, for love of you, what nothing else could have induced me to do. You deserve that I should set your mind entirely at rest. You deserve to have in your power the only man whom you have any occasion to fear. And as you dread the rivalry of this Bannière, as you would not perhaps be the stronger in a contest with him, I will show you my weapons; they are deadly. Persuasion, esteem, and love take him from my hands, and place him in yours."

The abbé opened his ears, and closed his arms.

"Know, then," said she, "that Monsieur Bannière is a runaway from a Jesuit novitiate."

The abbé shuddered.

"From what place?" said he.

"Avignon."

"The principal of that college is a friend of mine; his name is —"

"Mordon, is it not?"

"That 's it."

"And he is seeking by land and sea and mountain the fugitive whom I have hidden in my arms to this day."

"Merciful Heaven!" exclaimed the abbé, wild with joy.

"You understand," resumed La Catalane, "that I confide this secret to you as a man of honor. You understand that otherwise, and if I did not know you well, the poor wretch would be lost."

"Oh, yes!"

"A Jesuit novice, in short —"

"To be sure."

"A Jesuit novice, who turns actor."

"The devil!"

"A Jesuit novice, who, after turning actor, lives with an actress, and heaps indignities upon ministers of religion like you!"

"Yes, yes!"

"The poor boy does n't know what the result of that will be."

"Nobody knows," said the abbé, fairly trembling with joy.

"So then, my dear D'Hoirac, I place in your hands a
non which you will never use unless Bannière should
ten you too freely and too loud."
hanks, my soul!"
have suffered agony, you see, to see you at daggers
n with that hot head to whom your profession and

your cloth forbade you to reply, as your heart and your name would incline you to do."

"Oh, yes, I have suffered too," said the abbé, fiercely; "but — "

"But henceforth," continued La Catalane, "you are on guard and well armed. Now have the virtue of the strong, and be patient."

"Never fear."

"I beg you, do not let your anger get the better of you about a trifle; remember that in putting this poor youth in your hands, I have abundantly proven that you have nothing to fear from him; and as for myself — "

"I will do as you suggest, in every respect."

"Thanks! you are as generous in your dealings with men as with the ladies. How can one help loving you — what do I say? — adoring you?"

The abbé, happier than any pope, did not perceive that that evening he was adored for his forty-eight thousand livres.

La Catalane had nothing more to get out of him, and she knew it. Like a true courtesan, she thought only of herself. The abbé, young, handsome, and wealthy, had only one defect, his near-sightedness, — a defect to which La Catalane owed the success of all the talent she had brought into play since their acquaintance began.

Having thus skilfully steered her threatened bark into port, the unblushing impostor, with the aid of her confederate, had her money and was beyond fear of detection. The abbé, with the aid of his money, had had some hours of illusion.

Let us see what Bannière was to have.

XXXII.

MONSIEUR DE MAILLY'S RING.

THE unfortunate Bannière was in utter ignorance of the fine scheme that was being concocted against him. He did as children do when they are playing with powder, and hold the powder in one hand and fire in the other. He had resolved to avenge himself for all his self-inflicted suffering, upon Olympe,—that is to say, upon the only person in the wide world who really loved him.

He had suffered the pangs of jealousy; therefore he had resolved that Olympe should suffer in the same way.

The insensate fool, at the risk of breaking that noble heart, chose to punish her for mere imprudence; and that, too, when the only imprudent acts which she had committed had their origin in the very nobleness of her heart.

The day after the scene with the abbé, when Olympe thought the whole affair had passed from Bannière's mind, as it had from hers, he attended the rehearsal at the theatre, where he found all the company assembled. La Catalane was laughing as usual, and the hairdresser was studying the faces from behind the wings.

Olympe, like all great artists, was accustomed to rehearse with great gravity. On this particular day she ıt through her part even more seriously than usual. ı poor woman had reached that first phase of discouragement which is exhibited by habitual melancholy.

No more gayety, no more pleasure, either in the accomplishment of one's duty or in such matters as in former days were diverting and agreeable. The eye is dull, the heart can do naught but sigh, and the wound which cuts so deep monopolizes its strength so entirely that it can hardly find enough to beat regularly.

Olympe then was rehearsing her part. La Catalane was teasing this one or that in the wings.

Bannière went directly to her, and grasped her hands. He was very handsome that day, with the beauty which Nature had given him, and even more with the animation which a living thought evokes upon the features of man or woman, even though its purport be the doing an injury to one's nearest and dearest.

Bannière began to fool with La Catalane, and before long she had to defend herself against his assiduity. Indeed she not only defended herself, but she experienced an emotion which much resembled terror, when he approached her.

Her conscience reproached her for having been the instrument of his approaching ruin. It was as if she saw walking and talking and laughing before her a condemned man, ignorant of his doom.

It may be, too, that the actor's contemptuous demeanor which had endured so long, had wounded her.

But Bannière appeared to notice nothing. He was indefatigable in trying to win smiles and pleasant words from La Catalane; indeed, so fertile in expedients is revenge, he exhibited an extraordinary, coquettish vein, which nobody would have supposed him to possess.

La Catalane, be it said, was not a young woman of remarkable intelligence; on the other hand, hers was not a bad nature.

She would have loved Bannière dearly if he had loved

her. We know that she had shown herself at least as tenderly inclined as this new Joseph had shown himself indifferent.

It seemed very strange to her that this disdainful youth should seek her out at the very moment when she had decided to break with him forever.

However slight an admixture of philosophy a woman may possess, the most commonplace has an instinctive delicacy which is worth as much as the quintessence of all the huge treatises on psychology.

She began then, as we have said, by keeping Bannière at arm's length; then, seeing that he persisted, she yielded so far as to let him speak, although continuing to act on the defensive.

A vague idea came to her at first that Bannière wanted to make use of her in some way. The idea was short-lived, however; for if he suspected anything, he would surely employ neither gentle nor temporizing means to avert such imminent peril.

No, Bannière could know nothing; he came back because he came back; he was attracted by naught but the magnetism of her lovely eyes and the charm of her beauty.

It was a little late, no doubt; but the hour had struck at last. She could see passion speaking in his every look; in every act of his she could see an apology for his past disdain.

The little performance was observed by Olympe as by all the others. Bannière's shouts of laughter interfered with the rehearsal several times, and drew upon the offender a stern impatient "Hush!" from Mademoiselle de Clèves.

Then they withdrew into a dark corner, where they ›uld be heard whispering and giggling together, — a

variety of torture which is insupportable to a jealous person.

Olympe bravely put force upon herself, that she might not appear to notice Bannière's unseemly conduct.

La Catalane gently succumbed to the fascination of being courted by a fickle lover.

The rehearsal at an end, Olympe left the theatre without a sign of consciousness from Bannière, and went home without him.

La Catalane was very well content to be the cause of her rival's chagrin.

In the evening Bannière returned to the theatre, Olympe not being in the cast. When she saw him leave the house, she frowned, and said nothing.

But anger triumphed over dignity. Olympe during the evening appeared behind the scenes, where Bannière, who fully expected to see her, was making more violent love than ever to La Catalane, whose part that evening was as charming as her costume.

Bannière, by his energetic advances, had altogether convinced her that she had reason to repent having put his liberty in jeopardy just when he was ready to love her.

Why, it was her own property upon whom the bloodhounds of the law were to be let loose; it was, as a great diplomatist has since said, worse than a crime, — it was a mistake.

When she saw Olympe come to the theatre, contrary to her custom, — when she saw her, Olympe the haughty, enter the lists to fight for her lover, — La Catalane suddenly felt an inordinate desire to win.

So she took advantage of a moment when Olympe was looking darkly at them both, to say to the young man, —

"You say that you think me beautiful?"

"Yes."

"And that you love me?"

"Madly."

"And that you are sorry you have not told me before?"

"I said so, and I say it again."

"Then I must forget how ungrateful and rude you have been."

"Forget it, I implore you."

"Then I must forgive you."

"I crave your forgiveness."

"Well, then, in order that you may not believe that I depend on the breath of your caprice, in order that you may know that my affection is deep and sincere,— deeper and more sincere, be assured, than many passions which are paraded —"

Here she cast a malevolent glance in Olympe's direction.

Bannière shuddered.

"In order to prove that to you," continued La Catalane, "I beg you to come and take supper with me. We have very serious matters to discuss."

"That's a curious way of inviting a fellow," said Bannière, trying to joke. "You invite me with a sort of threat."

"Just look, pray, at those two pieces of cannon, under fire of which I am speaking to you."

"Poor Olympe!" thought Bannière, involuntarily recoiling a step.

"You accept, do you not?" asked La Catalane.

"Do I accept!"

"Oh, I know you. I know all the power which 's have over you; I know that to avoid displeasing in other people of whom you are afraid, you would n't breaking an appointment."

"Here is my word and my hand on it," said Bannière.

"At ten o'clock," said La Catalane.

"At ten o'clock," he repeated.

He had no time for more; Olympe fell like a thunderbolt between them.

Bannière, completely out of countenance, slunk away behind the side scenes.

La Catalane clinched her fists, like a woman determined to defend herself.

Olympe, pale, but calm and collected, after a fleeting, contemptuous glance which was lost upon Bannière, began to survey La Catalane from head to foot.

"You have a lovely costume," she said, in a mild voice, "and you are marvellously beautiful to-night."

La Catalane was expecting insults and an assault; she was almost speechless with amazement.

"Do you think so?" she stammered.

"You are beautiful enough," continued Olympe, "to make women jealous and lovers amorous. I strongly suspect my own lover of having fallen in love with you; but as I do not choose to be jealous, I beg you to tell me frankly if he really loves you. Oh, tell me, tell me in all sincerity; in my eyes you are so fair that I can understand that you have the remains of my affection."

La Catalane, satisfied and humbled at the same time, was preparing to reply; but at the first movement that she made Olympe uttered a cry terrible to hear.

She had seen on her ring-bedecked hand the ruby which came from Monsieur de Mailly, which Bannière had sold to the Jew, and the Jew to the Abbé d'Hoirac, and which La Catalane had received from the last-named.

Olympe pounced upon the hand, looked at the ring closely, recognized it, breathed a feeble sigh, and fainted.

The noise of her fall upon the boards recalled Bannière, who was as unable to understand the occurrence as La Catalane herself. But, beside himself with grief, he forgot all his schemes, seized Olympe in his arms, and carried her home, weeping bitterly and tearing his hair in his despair.

When he had succeeded in recalling her to consciousness, when, as he knelt beside her, he met the first glance of the poor girl, he was terrified at the wrath and hatred which it expressed.

"What is the matter? For God's sake, what is the matter, dear Olympe?" he said.

She extricated herself from his arms.

"What is the matter?" she replied. "You know very well; don't make me repeat it. The matter is that you promised me your love, and that now you offer me your compassion."

"Oh, you don't think it."

"But now you were offering your love — a contemptible love, I know — to that Catalane; now that my weakness has betrayed me, and you fear that you have wounded me too deeply, you cast off La Catalane for my benefit, just as you cast me off for hers."

"Never! never!"

"Oh, don't lie about it! Have at least the courage of honor. You know that I can no longer love you; try to retain my esteem, if nothing more."

"Olympe, those terrible words freeze my heart with terror; would you have so little indulgence for a poor, sick spirit, sick with jealousy?"

"Jealousy! — you!" said she, with supreme disdain.

"Oh, when I saw you receive that dandy, that idiot, that Abbé d'Hoirac here, when I saw him at your feet, when I heard his insulting offers, I thought that he could

not be there without some encouragement from you; I suspected you, I wished to show you what they suffer who suspect. I know that I committed a fault, a crime if you will; but pardon me. I have pardoned you."

"Yes! — for you, who only suspected, it was easy to pardon. Besides, you knew very well that I was not guilty. But, as for myself, can I doubt? Have I not the proof before my eyes?"

"The proof, — you have the proof!" he cried; "you have the proof, and of what?"

"I saw you."

"You saw me flirting and fooling and lying, and smiling artificial smiles at that woman, solely to annoy you, while I watched you closely to observe the effect of my wretched scheme, — that's what you saw."

"And the supper at ten o'clock?"

"It is ten o'clock now, and I am here at your feet."

"And that makes you a man of honor, does it?" she said with unutterable scorn; "but there is still another matter which you overlook, but which is quite enough to dishonor you in my eyes."

"What is it, Olympe, for God's sake?" he asked in terror.

"Do you dare to ask?"

"I implore you to tell me!"

"Decency would require that the woman to whom you sacrificed me should be, like myself, a refined and faithful person; decency would require that she should be content to keep your love-tokens carefully put away in her jewel-case, so that no one might recognize them as henceforth belonging to her."

"What do you mean by love-tokens," said he, "and by jewel-case?"

"Yes, go on with your lying, or trying to lie!"

"I do not understand."

"Oh!" said she, with a contemptuous elevation of her shoulders, "what a paltry, feeble nature you have, Monsieur Bannière, and how little you deserve to be loved by such a heart as mine! Do you really believe, then, that I should have been alarmed and should have fainted because I discovered that you were making an appointment with that woman? Make appointments with all Lyons, if you please; I should hardly care."

"Pray whence came the trouble, then, which had such an alarming result?"

"From your cowardice, your dishonor."

He started up, and raised his head.

"You insult me," he said, "for a trifling bit of folly."

"Trifling! Ah! you call by that name the 'bit of folly' which if related by me to the police would lead to your being shut up at Pierre-Encise within two hours."

"Would they shut me up for accepting from La Catalane an invitation to supper which I did not attend?"

"I am not talking about your appointments," said she, in a rage.

"What are you talking about, then? You will end by driving me mad."

"Better that I should drive you mad than denounce you as a thief."

"Thief!" he cried, with bloodless face; "oh, beware, Madame!"

"Yes, indeed! after stealing from the women, you strike them! You will strike me, and then go boast of it to La Catalane."

"Olympe! Olympe!"

"And then some day her turn will come, and you will steal from her and strike her for some other's sake."

"Olympe, I am growing blind! Take care, for I can't answer for myself!"

"There 's a ring which will have travelled a good deal up to the time when it will figure at the police court as a piece of damning evidence."

"The ring!" he muttered, "the ring! To be sure, I had forgotten that!"

He threw himself at Olympe's feet, and beat his head against the floor.

"Oh, you disgust me!" said she. "Only this hateful poltroonery was lacking. Rise, Monsieur, and go; I am no longer either grieved or angry. Go and find her with whom you have an appointment; tell her that she may henceforth show herself fearlessly with my ring, and that I will not tear it from her finger."

Bannière raised his head; his cheeks were wet with tears.

"Olympe!" he murmured, "what did you say?"

"I said that I give that woman the ring you have already given her after stealing it from me. I release both of you from your remorse and fear of the galleys."

Bannière stood erect, trembling and in disorder.

"I gave your ring to La Catalane, — I!" he exclaimed.

"And she wears it on her finger with the rings of her other lovers; she might at least have done you the honor of wearing it alone. The ruby is worthy the distinction."

"You say that La Catalane wears your ring on her finger?"

"Monsieur de Mailly's ring; yes, Monsieur Bannière."

"Olympe, we will send for La Catalane to come here. Olympe, if she has that ring on her finger, we will make her confess where she got it."

"Oh!"

"Olympe, I swear to you by everything sacred in this world; I swear by my love for you — that disgusts you! by religion — you smile! — I am stifling with rage and grief and pity! I swear to you by your mother that I never gave that ring to La Catalane!"

"Who has it on her finger! Swear now that you never stole it from me!"

"I did steal it from you! Yes, I stole it! That word is not degrading enough. I am a thief! Olympe, it is true; but I did it that I might sell it, and gamble with the proceeds, in the hope of gaining riches for you. Olympe, I cannot lie any more; what would be the use? The proofs are accessible. I sold the ruby to Jacob the Jew; he will tell you so. I never so much as thought of that woman. Give her your ring! Oh, I would have much preferred to die!"

"You were offering her your love."

"Olympe, don't think it. But then, what am I! Nothing but a poor, miserable wretch. Give her your ring, Olympe! Never, never!"

Olympe shook her head with an icy look which irritated Bannière.

"You don't believe me?" said he.

"No."

"Don't be so obstinate; you will regret it later. In half an hour the proof will be here. I will run to the Jew's now. Oh, no, I will not go, for you would think I had patched up a story with him. I will stay here, and do you go, Olympe, or better still, write him, for you are not feeling well and cannot walk. *Mon Dieu!* have mercy on me! You see that I am not lying! To take the ring from you was a crime, but not a theft. I had no profit from the money, much less did it go to benefit that woman. Oh, don't overwhelm me! I

hated the ring; it was a souvenir for you, — an agreeable one, perhaps, but hateful, hateful, hateful to me! Olympe, I implore you to lay aside that freezing demeanor; Olympe, do not drive me to despair! You accuse me, and I deny the charge. Look to the proofs; it will be time enough to condemn when you have the proof at hand."

"What 's the use?" said she; "something has died within me since you have been talking. I have done my utmost to rekindle in my heart a spark of sentiment, but I find nothing there. Love? — oh, it is dead! Pity? — dead! Between the two extremes what a galaxy of illusions! Don't defend yourself, it is n't worth while; I saw the ring on La Catalane's finger."

"Why could n't she have bought it from the Jew?"

"That 's weak; find something else, Monsieur Bannière."

"But suppose it 's true, nevertheless!" exclaimed the poor fellow, in a paroxysm of grief. "Suppose they tell you so, and prove it; suppose — "

"If the Jew were here and should say so, if La Catalane should grovel at my feet and say so, I would not believe them."

"*Mon Dieu!* Olympe!"

"This is the worst of this sort of thing. Blind is she who has never been deceived as I have been. Confidence and Distrust both wear bandages upon their eyes, — the one because she does not wish to see what is evil, and the other because she does not wish to see what is good."

Bannière, at his wits' end, his arguments and words alike exhausted, approached the window for a breath of fresh air.

Olympe remained where she was, sombre and impassive.

Just as Bannière, after looking upward as if to ask of

heaven an inspiration, was turning again toward Olympe to make a final effort, a shout came up from the street, and nailed him to the spot.

"Do not stir, Bannière," said a voice, "or you are a dead man!"

XXXIII.

THE ARCHERS.

BANNIÈRE heard the strange injunction which was laid upon him, and leaned out to look into the dark street.

Olympe trembled. Bannière was threatened with serious danger, and love was not so extinct at the bottom of her heart as she herself believed.

By leaning out, Bannière could see the cross-belts and bayonets of soldiers glistening along the wall opposite the house.

The movement he made was almost imperceptible and in no wise resembled flight, but the gun-barrels were aimed at him.

"Do not stir," the voice repeated, "or we fire on you."

Olympe forgot all that had gone before. She ran toward him.

"What is it?" she cried in affright.

"In the name of the king!" said the voice of a commissioner, who was just entering the house, the door having been opened to him; "in the king's name, I arrest you!"

"*Mon Dieu!* what does it mean?" exclaimed Olympe, clinging to Bannière's shoulder.

"Oh, these are doubtless the soldiers whom you asked the police to send to arrest your thief, Olympe," said Bannière, unable to repress the nervous trembling which

seized him, and maintaining his position only by clinging to the window-frame.

Olympe had not even time to protest. The door of the room flew open, and the terrified lackey showed the way to the commissioner and two fusileers.

"That 's Bannière," said the magistrate; "I recognize him."

"What is your business with me, pray?" feebly muttered the poor wretch.

The commissioner came forward, pointing him out with his finger to the soldiers, and repeating the same words he had said before, —

"In the king's name, I arrest you!"

"But what has he done?" cried Olympe.

"That 's the concern of the judges who will have to try Monsieur. I only know that I have a precept, and I am serving it."

They dragged Bannière away; and Olympe, forcibly separated from him, fell fainting upon a couch.

Bannière had already disappeared in the grasp of the soldiers. He had disappeared more firmly convinced every moment that Olympe was the moving cause of his arrest. He was wrong, however; for since the discovery she had made of Bannière's infidelity and the whereabouts of her ring, she had had neither time nor means to notify the police.

But the Abbé d'Hoirac had had twenty-four hours since La Catalane's revelation; he had made use of them like a man in haste to obtain revenge and liberty.

He had himself gone to the authorities, and laid the case before them. Was it not shameful that a man should have broken his vows and promises, and have left the Church for the stage, in defiance of all law, divine and human?

The vicar of the archbishop seemed deeply impressed, as may be imagined, by the problem thus laid before him.

He replied that to break the vow taken by the novice was a crime.

The Abbé d'Hoirac, delighted to find his opinion thus subscribed to, went on in the same line.

"Is it not true," said he, "that the scandal is the more hateful when caused by those who are looked to to set a good example?"

The archbishop's vicar replied that he was happy to find Monsieur d'Hoirac, who was reputed to be somewhat addicted to worldly pleasures, so devoutly disposed.

The abbé bowed with beaming face.

"You have some disreputable priest to denounce?" the vicar asked.

"Yes, Monsieur," replied the abbé.

"And this priest has gone on the stage?"

"Yes, Monsieur."

"Our powers are much circumscribed by the Parliament," said the vicar; "but we still have the right of inquiry."

"Ah," said the Abbé d'Hoirac, "I forewarn you that you have to do with a villain who has a sharp nose, and during the inquiry he will get scent of the chase and disappear."

"What is his name?"

The abbé hesitated about naming him. An evil action never issues readily from the heart of an honorable man, although such actions sometimes do issue from such hearts.

"It is he who plays the emperors at the city theatre," said the abbé.

"Aha! it's Bannière, then?" said the vicar, who

was well posted in matters theatrical, like many ecclesiastics of the time.

"Precisely."

"Indeed, he does n't act badly," said the vicar. "I like his declamation very well; he has a fine delivery and a well-modulated voice."

"Oh, yes, I have nothing to say against him in that respect."

"And you say he is a runaway novice?"

"Yes, from the Jesuit college at Avignon."

"I will write to Père Mordon to send and reclaim him."

"That 's very well; but as I had the honor to say, when Père Mordon's reclamation arrives, Bannière will have fled."

The vicar scratched his chin a moment.

"I see what you would like," he said; "a provisional arrest, — what we call officially a precautionary seizure."

"For the greater glory of morality," said the abbé.

"Yes; *ad majorem Dei gloriam!*" said the archbishop's vicar, laughing. He was nursing a little inclination toward Jansenism, and was not sorry to have his little joke at the Society of Jesus, when opportunity offered.

D'Hoirac's lips parted in a smile which disclosed his even, white teeth.

"You are still interested in the Jesuits?" asked the official, smiling too, but with no teeth to show, alas!

"I like all kinds," replied the abbé; "and in that respect I follow the example of my respected relative the archbishop, who is more of a shepherd than a pastor. You of the old school are more exclusive, and don understand that. If the late king were alive, you wc be charged with Arnauldism or Port-Royalism; while

a Jesuit, like the bee of which Horace sings, gather the honey of orthodoxy from every flower."

"Even though they grow on the stage," said the official, with his most cunning smile.

"Everywhere, I said, Monsieur le Vicaire," replied D'Hoirac. "I need not write myself then to my uncle's friend, Père Mordon; and you are obliged to me, are you not, for leaving the credit of the capture with you in his estimation?"

"Very much so, my dear Abbé. I am extremely glad to be useful to Messieurs the Jesuits, when they are endeavoring to be agreeable to us. Reverend Père Mordon is a man of intellect, and will repay the service I am about to do him."

"And now," asked D'Hoirac, "when will you execute this precautionary seizure?"

"Whenever you think fit, Monsieur l'Abbé!"

"Will this evening do?"

"This evening?"

"Yes."

"Is it practicable?"

"Perfectly."

"This evening, then. Have you any choice as to the manner of arrest?"

"Oh, no! Let there be no public scandal, that 's all."

"Shall we arrest him at home, then?"

"I think that will be the best plan."

"Where does he live?"

"I 'm sure I don't know."

The abbé preferred not to seem familiar with Bannière's abode, for then he must show that he knew Olympe's also.

"Oh, the devil!" said the vicar; "you don't know?"

"You can have inquiry made at the theatre," suggested D'Hoirac.

"You are right; that shall be done, Monsieur l'Abbé."

"One last question."

"Put it."

"Explain to me, I beg, Monsieur le Vicaire, the progress of an affair of the variety we are discussing."

"That 's very easy."

"I am listening."

"Precautionary seizure, formal arrest, incarceration."

"Provisional."

"It is all provisional. Of course, Monsieur l'Abbé, you must know that it can be nothing more than provisional in such a case. Incarceration, — I had got so far, — reclamation by the reverend principal, argument, provisional return of the novice to the convent, and private examination of the case before the proper official."

"Ah, before the officials at Avignon?"

"Oh, no! before the official of the place where the fugitive has been living and was arrested."

"Very good! at Lyons then."

"At Lyons, yes; perhaps that will be disagreeable for you?" the vicar asked slyly.

"By no means, Monsieur. And then?"

"Then, as I was saying, the trial."

"An ecclesiastical trial is a long-winded affair, is it not?"

"Oh, it has no end, especially when some influential person is interested in having it continue."

"And meanwhile will the poor wretch be kept always in confinement?"

"No. When he is restored to the Jesuits, he becomes

their pupil again; and as the reverend fathers are extremely clever in keeping their grip upon those who do not desire to stay with them, and as they can make themselves very disagreeable to those who resist, it is almost certain that within two or three years the novice will make his profession, and accept orders with very good grace."

"Ah! who knows?" said the abbé, whose thoughts were so full of Olympe that he was little inclined to believe that any one could forget her, having once known her.

"In any event," continued the vicar, who saw that something was tormenting the abbé, and was anxious to reassure him,—"in any event, whether prisoner or Jesuit, our shameless novice will not be able, for a long time hence, never indeed, to scandalize society with a repetition of the disgraceful performances which have so justly offended your devout disposition."

The abbé thanked the official and took leave of him, determined not to make his appearance at Olympe's house until after the disappearance of the principal obstacle to his happiness.

As the vicar had promised, the armed force, led by a commissioner, had taken Bannière into custody that same evening, upon his requisition, as was narrated in the last chapter.

Père Mordon received the letter containing the news the day after the precautionary seizure.

The Jesuit, enchanted at the thought of recovering his lost lamb, forwarded his formal reclamation to the magistrate at Lyons; this reclamation, intrusted to the college courier, an intelligent fellow, who, like the mule of Phèdre, knew how to trot and to gallop when necessary to accomplish the ends of the order, and always

ad majorem Dei gloriam, reached Lyons two days after the little squad had hurried Bannière off to prison.

Bannière evinced no particular disposition to rebel. He was buried in such black despair that except for the automatic action of his legs, obeying the impulse given from time to time by blows with the butt end of a musket, one would have thought the poor boy turned to a pillar of salt, as Lot's wife was for her fatal curiosity.

The archers were hurrying along behind the commissioner, and the commissioner gathering up the skirts of his robe so that he might travel more quickly, when the escort, at a street corner, ran plump into another party, just turning in from the adjoining street.

A dragoon with a lantern came into collision with the commissioner, to whom, not recognizing his quality, he administered a violent blow, accompanied with these words, —

"Well, you sot, don't you see my officer?"

The commissioner would have asserted his dignity and entered a protest if it had been a mere lieutenant; but by the rays of the lantern he recognized the uniform of a colonel; so he restrained his ill-humor, and made way for the others to pass.

The party then disclosed itself as consisting of three dragoons, two of whom were a little distance in the rear, and an exceedingly handsome cavalier, with lace at his wrists, and perfumed with roses.

Behind the dragoons was a small valet bearing his master's sword and cloak.

The colonel, looking askance at the commissioner and his henchmen, said to the lantern-bearer, —

"Aha! show a light here, Laverdrie; there 's game behind the commissioner, I think."

"Yes, Monsieur le Colonel," replied he of the black robe, humbly.

"Very well, very well, do your duty," replied the colonel, with a disdainful accent. "By the way, what street is this?"

"Rue de la Réale, Monsieur le Colonel."

"Oh, that's not what I'm looking for. Is there not a Rue Montyon about here?"

"You are within reach of it, Monsieur le Colonel; it's the street we just left."

"Very good, thanks."

"The first to the left, Monsieur le Colonel."

"Go on, Laverdrie."

"Yes, Colonel."

"And do you," said the officer to the valet, "see if you can discover the residence of Mademoiselle Olympe de Clèves."

The valet quickened his pace, and preceded those whom he had been following.

At the name of Olympe, Bannière seemed to awake as from the sleep of death. He opened his eyes, saw the lantern, the epaulettes, the uniforms, heard the clashing of spurs and the sound of voices.

The consequence was that he seated himself upon a stone, unable to take another step.

"Oh, *mon Dieu!* oh, *mon Dieu!*" he muttered again and again.

Meanwhile the dragoons and their colonel had gone on.

"Oh, *mon Dieu!*" still the same refrain.

"Well, well! are we going on or not?" the commissioner demanded.

"Monsieur, the prisoner will not move," replied an archer.

"Strike him with your muskets, strike him!"

"We have struck him, Monsieur."

"Prick him with your bayonets, then."

"We have pricked him too, Monsieur."

The commissioner approached in a rage. The worthy man had never seen such a thing! The blows with the musket sometimes failed to overcome resistance, but the pricking never.

Bannière sat there on his stone, pale, dishevelled, and suffering agony. His glassy eyes were fixed obstinately upon Rue Montyon, at the spot where he had seen the last of the valet, the lantern-bearer, and the two dragoons following the colonel, who was on his way to Olympe, without doubt.

"Oh, *mon Dieu!*" he groaned; "this explains it all. She was expecting a new lover, and had me arrested to get me out of the way. Oh, *mon Dieu!*"

The fact is that such an idea was enough to tan the hide of any man in love, however sensible he might be, to such a point as to render it impervious to gunstock or bayonet.

The commissioner employed the last means which the law left open to him. He caused Bannière to be laid upon a couch of interlocked muskets, and the poor boy was carried in that fashion to the *maison de ville*, where he was deposited in a cell.

The archers suffered even more than he, for they found him very heavy.

XXXIV.

MONSIEUR DE MAILLY.

Olympe had not begun to recover from the grief and alarm caused by the arrest of Bannière, when she heard more strange voices at her street door, and the next moment in her reception-room.

The servant, still trembling from the effects of the visit of the archers, did not hesitate to introduce without preliminary announcement a fresh arrival in uniform, accompanied by several others.

Indeed the honest fellow would have shown in a whole army in the same way, if it had presented itself at his mistress's door.

Olympe, hastening to the door to know the cause of the sounds, and hoping vaguely that they were bringing Bannière back, suddenly recoiled, exclaiming, —

"Monsieur de Mailly!"

It was, in fact, the colonel, who entered the room, with his lantern-bearer in his wake, weary of asking if Mademoiselle de Clèves was visible, and out of patience at receiving no reply.

"Yes, Madame," said he; "it is I, no other. You have a remarkably silent servant there."

"Monsieur de Mailly!" said Olympe, again; her mind, weakened by the recent excitement, made no attempt to face this new storm.

"Well — but — I seem to produce all the effect of a ghost here, — the effect of a husband!" said the colonel, smiling.

"Pardon me, pardon me!" stammered Olympe.

The dragoon and the servant withdrew when they saw the colonel take her hand.

She seated herself, half dead with conflicting emotions.

"I either terrify you or incommode you," said Monsieur de Mailly, courteously, "whereas I claim that I ought to produce neither effect upon you,—no more when I am by your side than when I am far away."

Olympe made no reply; she was suffocating.

"We are still friends, I suppose," continued Monsieur de Mailly. "I came here to have the honor of seeing you, and I hope that there is no one who can possibly be offended by the presence in your house of a friend who presents himself with civility."

Olympe stammered out a few words interrupted by sobs.

"I prefer to withdraw rather than cause you the slightest embarrassment," said the colonel. "I came here the bearer of what in my mind was a bit of good news; but I fear now that it may be bad."

Olympe at last ventured to trust herself; she raised her eyes to Monsieur de Mailly's.

"Good news, Monsieur le Comte?" said she, with a sad smile.

"But not finding you free," pursued the colonel, "I hesitate."

"Free!" she repeated.

"Oh, I know that you are not free, that you have bartered away the liberty which I restored to you."

"Monsieur—"

"I restored it to you, Mademoiselle; of course you were at liberty to make whatever use of it you chose. Believe me when I say that I should not think of reproaching you in any way. I have understood that you were dearly loved and very happy."

"Very happy!" cried Olympe, bursting into tears; "you have heard that?"

"Why, yes; are you not?"

"Look at me."

"You weep; is it with joy?"

"Do you think so?"

"Does my presence offend you?"

"Oh, no."

"Then you make me very anxious. Is it possible that I may be of some use to you, even if my presence has no attraction for you?"

"Monsieur le Comte, I have no right to ask anything at your hands."

"Perhaps not, but I have the right to offer you something."

"Nothing, nothing, I beg you. Turn your back on me, for I do not deserve that you should be my friend."

He drew nearer to her.

"Are you at liberty to go to Paris?" he asked.

"Why?"

"To make your début at the Comédie-Française; I have an order to that effect."

"Then you still take an interest in my fortunes?"

"Always. It is a friend's right."

"Even though you thought I was happy?"

"I knew very well that you were not. I know all; the man whom you chose —"

"Say no ill of him, he is so unfortunate!"

"I meant to say only that he was not worthy of you."

"It was a mistake on my part, — an act of madness born of your desertion."

"Therefore I deem myself the cause of your misfor-

tunes; and that thought led me to come to your assistance, to rescue you, if there is still time and if you are willing."

"Speak, Monsieur le Comte."

"You must make up your mind, Olympe, to leave this man who makes you miserable and is ruining you."

"You know, then?"

"Everything, as I told you. You must leave Monsieur Bannière; be brave enough for that."

"Alas! it is already done."

"You have left him?"

"Poor boy! we are separated. Yes, he was arrested but a short time ago."

"What had he done, *mon Dieu!* He will disgrace you, the wretch!"

"He has done nothing, poor fellow! He was arrested in pursuance of a reclamation by the Jesuits. He is a rebellious recruit of that order; you know what that means, perhaps."

"Indeed I do. And the official caused his seizure?"

"In my house!" she cried, weeping.

"In your house! Here?"

"Not a quarter of an hour ago."

"Ah, *mon Dieu!* by six archers and a commissioner?"

"Yes."

"Was he not a tall, dark fellow, slender and well set up?"

"Yes, yes!"

"How pale he was!"

"Did you see him?"

"I met him in the custody of the archers on my way hither."

"*Mon Dieu! mon Dieu!* then he must have seen you!"

"He even heard me pronounce your name and ask your address."

"Oh, the poor boy! it will kill him!"

"It will kill him!" cried the colonel, in surprise; "why so?"

"Because he is jealous of you; because he knows well —"

Olympe was on the point of betraying herself, of divulging the secret of her heart. It seemed to her at that moment to be influenced by sincere feeling, — that heart which had been led astray for a year by no one knows what illusions and vagabond enjoyment.

"What does he know?" asked the colonel, softly.

"He knows," said Olympe, firmly, "that I have always had much respect for you, Monsieur le Comte."

"Respect?"

"That is the only sentiment which I could allow myself to retain for you," murmured the young woman, whose tears burst forth afresh.

The colonel took her hand and pressed it.

"Do you regret him?" he said; "do you pity him?"

"Yes, I do pity him, and I regret him too, — not the life which he has made me lead, alas! although I loved him and led him on. For I will not be a coward and deny my affection, even though it were unworthy. No, I do not regret him; but I cannot help saying that he is now much to be pitied, and that all his life the unlucky fellow will not only suffer, but will lay his suffering at my door."

"You gratify me, Olympe, by speaking thus," said the colonel. "Loyal I always found you, and loyal I find you still. If you knew how one's heart glows to find that its affection is worthily bestowed! You are a generous woman. I will rescue you. I did not know

that the fellow was arrested, but I knew that he was making your life unendurable, and that you sometimes had thoughts of cutting loose from him. I should have been deeply disappointed to have you deny him, or to find that you still love him."

"May I hope then that I have your esteem at least, in default of your love?" said Olympe.

"Rely upon all my sentiments; but let us attend to the most pressing business first. Make your preparations, and let us start."

"For Paris?"

"Yes, Olympe. I have horses and carriage in waiting."

"I will say nothing about my engagement here, for I know that the king's command overrides everything; but I must speak about a certain ill-fated prisoner, who will die of grief if he learns of my departure in his dungeon. He will accuse me of cruelty or ingratitude, if of nothing worse; for after all it was for me that he left the Jesuits."

"However we can't share his imprisonment with him."

"You can use your influence to procure his release."

"I have no power in ecclesiastical matters."

"Try."

"By no means, my dear; you are wrong in looking upon yourself as under obligations to the man. He is in prison; let him stay there. Congratulate yourself rather upon being thus freed from your embarrassment."

"Never! it would be dastardly. I am incapable of it. I will not abandon him in his misfortune."

"That is chivalry thrown away."

"No; my heart tells me what to do."

"In any event you cannot compel the magistrate to ase a culprit duly convicted."

"No Paris for me, if that poor fellow is not free. You fancy me a woman without heart, capable of forgetting in his dungeon, because she has ceased to love him, a man whose ruin she has wrought; a woman without pity, capable of enjoying life in Paris while the lover whom she once chose is dying of rage and grief in a convent cell. No, no; you would despise a woman who would yield to you upon this point, Monsieur le Comte; you could not love her."

"Olympe, Olympe, you are not yet cured! You have something more than compassion for that man."

"Do not insist," said she; "you will make me doubt your feeling for me, if you fail to understand me."

"Olympe, if I should rescue that man for you, you would succumb again to his allurements."

"Oh!"

"That sort of people have no spinal cord, they are like reptiles; supple and easily crushed when they are threatened, they raise their heads when the storm has passed. The serpent has tempted you, daughter of Eve, and will tempt you again."

"Monsieur le Comte, promise me that the poor wretch shall be free in two hours, and I will be upon the road to Paris in fifty minutes."

"Ah, that 's something like!"

"Promise."

The count reflected a moment.

"You are quite sure of yourself?" he said.

"Give me your word as a gentleman in exchange for mine as a girl of noble birth."

"Done!" said the count; "now help me to find a pretext."

"Oh, I 'm of no use in that direction; I am, as you see me, completely prostrated. Ideas, Monsieur le Comte!

I have n't had one a week on an average for a year; and I shall not have another for a year to come."

"Wait till I think up something, then."

"How good you are!"

"I see no way to arrange it. To get a priest out of a priest's hands is like enticing the devil into holy water. One is sure to get splashed."

"How about the archbishop?"

"Bah! we are at swords' points, and the Jesuits would play me some trick. Wait — I see a way."

"Ah!"

"Yes; but your protégé in order to escape one form of slavery will have to step into another."

"Is it a milder form?"

"Yes, indeed, and has the great advantage of being more in the open air."

"What is it?"

"Let him enlist in my dragoons. The Jesuits will claim him, but we will tell them that their monk is a dragoon, and that the dragoons are the king's; they will have to let their prey go."

"That is, indeed, a happy thought," said Olympe, joyfully.

"You understand, my dear, that instead of demanding the liberty of a man, I charge the Jesuits with having taken my dragoon away from me; that will change the face of things, and put them in the wrong."

"You are a man of good heart and quick wit," said Olympe, sweetly, "and I am as grateful to you as Bannière will be."

"All right; but I rather prefer your gratitude to his. So the idea commends itself to you?"

"Marvellously!"

You have duly reflected?"

"I have."

"You will have no return of your affection for him?"

"Never!"

"The embryo Jesuit tempted you, and the embryo dragoon will be at least as seductive."

"You know, Monsieur de Mailly, that if I did yield to the mad caprice which was near being my ruin, it was after you left me."

"I know it, Olympe."

"You know, Monsieur, that I never deceived you while your love was alive."

"I believe it."

"My word is sacred, and my hand goes only with my heart."

"I do you that justice."

"Then trust me always. I have promised you to love Monsieur Bannière no more; that settles it, and I will love him no more."

"But I know why I said that."

"Why?"

"Because we have got to induce this youth to sign the enlistment papers; it is a delicate proceeding, and only you can undertake it, and at such a crisis the heart of the most courageous of word-givers may waver. Now you just told me, to reassure me, that you had never deceived me so long as you were mine; that is true. But now you are not mine, you are Monsieur Bannière's."

"Oh!" said she, gazing at him with eyes so eloquent that he felt a thrill of love reach the inmost recesses of his heart,—"whether I am Monsieur Bannière's or not, what matters it?"

"You must see," he replied, "from my seeking you out here, and bringing you an order for your début, that I love you still."

"Upon your honor?" said she.

"Upon my honor."

"Well, then," said Olympe, "I will prove to you that I have the strong heart of a man when resolution and confidence are essential. Twelve o'clock is striking; it is the hour at which I was awaiting you at Avignon a year ago, day for day."

"It is true, Olympe, and that day, or rather that night, the king recalled me; but I would have done well not to read his letter till the morning."

"Let us forget that year, Comte," said she. "You love me still, and it is for me to prove to you that I have always loved you. I will accept the king's command and will go with you to Paris. Now are you afraid of seeing me waver when I go to set that unhappy prisoner free?"

"I will go with you myself to the prison," replied the count.

Soon after the Mailly dragoons were heard in the street shouting boisterous refrains, which made the commissioners and the archers shudder as they returned from the prison where Bannière's name was entered.

That poor fellow hardly suspected, as he lay upon his straw pallet under the damp arches, that two generous hearts were working together for his deliverance.

It was true, however,—as true as his misery.

XXXV.

THE ENLISTMENT.

BANNIÈRE was still lying on the straw in the darkness the next morning, when a turnkey came to tell him that he had a visitor.

We cannot describe the state of frenzy to which solitude and neglect had driven him.

He was one of those nervous prisoners who lose their wits in a week, and die in six, more exhausted than others in six years.

He had already passed through all the successive stages of hope, discouragement, and despair, which others never reach before verdict, sentence, and torture.

His most bitter pangs were suspicion and jealousy.

He suspected Olympe of having caused his incarceration; he suspected her of having made an appointment with the colonel of dragoons.

Worse than all, he had heard, as the archers were carrying him away, that that colonel was Monsieur de Mailly.

Imagine his anger and his distrust.

In such a frame of mind was he when Olympe's visit was announced.

He bounded toward her as soon as he saw her, with an impulse of mad delight, which was moderated at once by the sense of what his dignity required as well as by the glacial air with which Olympe had armed herself.

"Ah!" exclaimed Bannière, "here you are at last!"

"Did you not expect me?"

"I did not believe, Mademoiselle, that you would have the face to come and mock at me, after casting me into the abyss."

"Don't waste words, Monsieur Bannière; you seem to play in hard luck in this world."

"Ah, but you helped me wonderfully to lose the game!"

"What do you mean?"

"Is it not to you that I owe my present imprisonment?"

"If you mean to reproach me because you loved me and abandoned your profession for me, you are right, and I am the cause of your imprisonment."

"That's not what I mean at all; I mean that I loved you, and you denounced me to the police."

"Oh, you know very well that I could never be guilty of such a dastardly piece of work."

"Can the same be said of that colonel of dragoons who was looking for you last night, and who doubtless found you?"

Olympe turned pale in spite of herself; although she expected the thrust, she was well aware that she had no valid defence.

"You saw Monsieur de Mailly, did you not?" said she, in a tone perceptibly tinged with pity.

Bannière took her evident grief as a sign of regret or of fear.

"Oh, well," said he, "I have convinced you, have n't I? It is perfectly clear now that you and your old lover conspired to ruin me."

"That is so far from being the case, Monsieur Bannière, that I have come from Monsieur de Mailly to bring you a chance of regaining your liberty."

"Liberty!" cried the young man, in amazement.

"You are arrested because of a reclamation by the Jesuits; you belong to them. Well, it occurred to Monsieur de Mailly to have you enlist in his dragoons. In that way you will belong to the king, who will also reclaim you, and will be at no loss to lay hands upon you."

"That is very generous!" said Bannière, satirically.

"You do wrong to speak of a kind action in that bitter tone. Monsieur de Mailly was under no obligation to do you this service."

"Ah, you take his part against me; you care more for his nobility than for my misfortune."

"Your misfortune, Monsieur Bannière, was richly deserved," said Olympe, gravely; "but this is no time for recrimination. Here is the enlistment in blank, the enlistment which will save you from the Jesuits, — from everlasting seclusion, that is to say, and from the ecclesiastical profession, for which you are little suited; do you choose to sign it?"

"In the first place, tell me what you are going to do with me; for there is an air of decision in your tones which surprises me. Explain — "

"Nothing until you have signed this paper."

"But it is impossible for me to accept a favor from a man whom perhaps you still love."

"That does not concern you, Monsieur Bannière; first of all, sign."

"What interest have you, pray, in being so anxious to bind me thus?"

"To rescue you, to prove to you that I had no hand in your incarceration by opening the doors of your cell. Sign!"

Bannière took the pen handed to him by Olympe, who had everything in readiness. He signed his name

without reading the document which insured his freedom.

She folded the paper after she had dried the signature, and put it away in her pocket.

"Now," said Bannière, kissing her hand, "tell me that you still love me."

But without replying to him, she said, —

"Armed with this paper, Monsieur de Mailly will claim you this morning. You will be free this afternoon at four o'clock, when there will have been time to go through all the indispensable formalities."

"You did n't answer me, Olympe," said Bannière, gently; "I asked you if you still love me."

"Don't be anxious if there should be some little delay," continued Mademoiselle de Cléves in the same tone. "The magistrate will be reluctant to let go his prey, but Monsieur de Mailly has decided to act peremptorily."

"Olympe!" Bannière interrupted once more, and more forcibly.

"It also occurred to me," she continued, without appearing to notice the prisoner's burning eagerness to change the subject, "that you would lack means of subsistence here; so I have brought you some money, so that when you leave the prison you will be in condition to assume at once the swagger and jaunty air which a soldier should have."

"Look here, Olympe," said Bannière, in desperation, "don't you propose to answer me? I asked you if you still love me."

"I do not propose to reply, in fact, Monsieur Bannière."

"But I propose that you shall reply."

"Then I will speak frankly, as I think. No, Monsieur Bannière, I do not love you."

"You do not love me!" cried Bannière, terrified by Olympe's words, and more than all else by the tone in which they were spoken.

"No!" she said again.

"Why not?" stammered the poor wretch.

"Because you have worn away, strand by strand, the golden thread of my love; because, even before it broke, you had sullied and tarnished it, and dimmed its lustre; and because, with a woman, illusion is the great preservative of love. You deceived me, then mocked at me, then maltreated me; my illusion has vanished, consequently I have ceased to love."

"Olympe!" he shrieked, grovelling at her feet, "I swear that I have never deceived you!"

"I do not believe you!"

"Olympe, I swear by my own life and yours that I never gave your ring to La Catalane."

"I do not believe you."

"Listen, Olympe! Since I am to be free and able to act, it will be very easy. If La Catalane is or ever has been my mistress, it must have been to gratify some sentiment or other, must it not? Either caprice or jealousy or weakness. Either she provoked me or I besought her. In any case her self-conceit will make her boast of it. I ask you to come to her with me, and she will tell you all that has taken place between us. If she says that I have been her lover, if she says that I gave her your ring, do with me as you please. Kill me, — no, do even more than that, — leave me!"

The unfortunate man uttered these words so forcibly and naturally, he put so much heart and so much passion in them, he writhed at Olympe's feet in such an agony of despair, that she was moved, and she let him see it.

"How can you conceive," he continued, "that I could

have loved another woman, even for a moment, when you were my whole life and my whole heart! An infidelity of the imagination — *mon Dieu!* you will pardon it; I would pardon it in you. See now whether I love you. If you should tell me that Monsieur de Mailly has returned, that he went on his knees to you to return to him, that he persuaded you, for you were weak — Olympe, I am a miserable, cowardly devil, my love is paltry and good for nothing, but I would forgive everything if you told me that you still loved me!"

Olympe felt as if her heart stopped its beating; she feared that she should waver and weaken, and abandon her hand to the fervent kisses of this man to whose words the eloquence of true love gave such irresistible force.

Her only salvation lay in violence and brutality. She hardened her heart and resorted to that stern obduracy which women fall back upon when they have ceased to love, or believe that to be the case.

"Very well!" said she; "you have saved me the trouble of telling you what I desired to conceal. Monsieur de Mailly has returned; he did go on his knees to me, and did persuade me. I was weak, and I no longer control my own actions."

As the words fell from her mouth, she saw the blood leave Bannière's cheeks, his lips and his neck, as it flowed roaring back to his heart.

He seemed a pitiable object to the woman who was shaking his very soul.

"Ah, Olympe, Olympe!" he muttered.

He trembled in all his limbs, and his legs gave way under him. From his knees he fell back to a sitting posture, then rolled over on his side, and would have measured his whole length on the floor if he had not

fallen against the wooden stool which was the only seat provided for prisoners.

She maintained a gloomy silence, while he struggled to recall the life which seemed to be leaving his body.

"You will not be inflexible," he said at last, with an effort, "on the ground of a crime which I did not commit, when I am not so in respect to a sin which you have admitted. I forgive you, Olympe; give me back your love."

"Bannière," said she, in a stifled voice, "if I had not believed you guilty, I never would have been false to the faith I plighted to you — Do not interrupt me. You repent now, I can see; you appreciate now what I am, but it is too late."

Bannière looked at her with the expression of one whose wits are wandering.

"Henceforth, Banniére," she continued, growing bolder, "we are separated; let me say to you that if you had chosen I would have been faithful to you forever — "

"Oh, *mon Dieu!* " he muttered, as he had done the night before when he saw Monsieur de Mailly.

"Don't interrupt me again, Monsieur Bannière; as I have told you, I no longer control my own actions. Live, work, and forget, — it will be very easy for you, — and believe that of our two destinies yours is the happier. To-day you regret; who can say that to-morrow I myself shall not be the one to regret? "

With these words, which attested her affectionate and generous nature, Olympe made a step toward the door. As he saw her on the point of leaving him, Bannière made a leap, or rather started to make one.

"No," said he; "it 's of no use. She is no mere flirt. When she says that she has ceased to love me, it is because that is the fact."

He fell back again prostrate upon the floor.

Olympe approached him, and seeing him in that condition, bordering upon lunacy, she held out her hand to him; he did not notice it.

She slipped between his fingers the purse of gold she had brought; he gave no sign that he perceived it.

Then she moved again toward the door, and he did not lift a finger to prevent her.

Her heart was almost bursting with anguish; with her eye fixed upon the poor youth whom she was deserting, she felt drawn to him by every sentiment of duty and loyalty.

It may be that a word from Bannière, a tear, a sigh, or even the slightest movement would have called forth a last proof of tender emotion; but the man was dead to all intent, and required no further attention.

She caused the door of the cell to be opened, and went out, more terrified than ever, swiftly as a ray of light, fearing, even when she was in the open air once more, that a reaction would take place, that a shriek from the poor fellow, a heart-rending appeal to the old love, a beating upon the inflexible doors, would fall upon her ear, to reproach her for her decision and make her courage waver.

Nothing! She heard no sound except the rustling of the paper upon which Bannière had signed his enlistment as a dragoon, and the corners of which were in revolt against the heavy silk of her dress.

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